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THE

WORKS

OF

LORD BOLINGBROKE.

WITH

A LIFE,

PREPARED EXPRESSLY FOR THIS EDITION,

CONTAINING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELATIVE TO HIS PERSONAL AND PUBLIC CHARACTER,

SELECTED FROM THE BEST AUTHORITIES.

Henry Saint-John Bolingbroke

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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A LETTER,

OCCASIONED BY ONE OF

ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON'S SERMONS.

I COME from reading, in Barbeyrac's translation of Tillotson's sermons, the discourse you mentioned on a late occasion; and the effect of it has been to confirm me in this opinion, that the theist is a much more formidable enemy to the atheist than the divine.

The former takes all the real advantages against a common adversary, which the latter has it in his power to take; but he gives none against himself, as the latter is forced to do. When the divine writes or disputes on any subject, relative to his profession, he is always embarrassed by his theological system; whether his mind be so, or not, his tongue and his pen cannot be otherwise. A theist is under no constraint of this kind. He may speak the truth, such as it appears to him, when the divine, though it appears the same to him, must be silent. The theist may be silent, by regards of prudence, when the divine is obliged to speak, by the obligation of his profession, and to maintain what he cannot defend, as well as what he can: and thus, if he imposes on some, he exposes himself to the attacks of others. When the theist has demonstrated the existence of a Supreme, all-perfect Being, and the moral obligations of his rational creatures, he stops, where the means of human knowledge stop, and makes no vain and presumptuous efforts to go beyond them, by the help of reason or revelation. Just so, when he has proved that the world had a beginning, on foundations of the highest probability tradition can give, he stops short likewise; because, in the nature of things, we can have no other proof of the fact. Not so the divine. His system drags him on. He attempts, most absurdly, to support, in the first case, a demonstrated truth by false arguments; and, in the second, to make tradition vouch for

more than any receivable tradition does or can vouch. The archbishop, himself, seems sensible of this in one place: for having asserted the universal assent of mankind to this great truth, that there is a God, and having ascribed the universality of this assent to the nature of the human mind, on which God has impressed an innate idea of himself, he tries to evade the absurdity by adding "or which, that is the human mind, is so disposed, that men may discover, by the due use of its faculties, the existence of God." He endeavors to evade the theological absurdity, which he could not maintain, but he endeavors it in vain: for it is evidently false, that the two propositions are in any sort the same. The difference between affirming that the mind of man is able, by a due use of its faculties, to discover the existence of God, and that the mind of man has an innate idea of this existence, which prevents and excludes the use of any mental faculties, except that of bare perception, is too obvious to be insisted upon.

Divines reason, sometimes, on this subject with more precaution. They slide over the doctrines of innate ideas, without maintaining, or renouncing it directly, and think it sufficient to say, that the belief of a God is founded on a certain natural proportion, which there is, between this great truth and the conceptions of the human mind. I inclined, as you know, to think in the same manner, and to believe, that the first men, at least, who knew that they were such, and who saw the material world begin, would be led, by the natural conceptions of their minds, to acknowledge a first cause of infinite wisdom and power, and far above all these conceptions. Thus it seemed to me, that the tradition of a fact, and of an opinion grounded on it, which are apt to be confounded, though they should be always distinguished, might come down together. But I confess myself obliged, on further reflection, to abandon this hypothesis. I abandon it with the less regret, because, whatever the first men might think, nay, whether the world had a beginning in time, as I am firmly persuaded it had, or not, the demonstration of God's existence will remain unshaken. But I am obliged to abandon it, because a natural and intimate proportion between the existence of God, and the universal conceptions of the human mind, may appear chimerical, and perhaps is so. It is, I doubt, chimerical, even when it is applied to the first men. The variety of the phenomena, which struck their senses, would lead the generality, most probably, to imagine a variety of causes, and more observations and deeper reflections, than the first men could make, were necessary to prove the unity of the first cause. That some made them, at least very early, can scarce be doubted. So that the orthodox belief and polytheism might grow up together, though the latter might spread wider and faster than the former.

If there was really such a proportion, or such a conformity, as is assumed, particular men, philosophers here and there, might have held polytheism notwithstanding this; but the general opinion of mankind would have been the orthodox opinion, instead of which we know that polytheism and idolatry prevailed almost every where. Polytheism and idolatry, therefore, seem more conformable to human ideas, abstracted from the first appearances of things, and better proportioned, by an analogy of human conceptions, to the uncultivated reason of mankind, and to understandings not sufficiently informed. Our archbishop supposes it objected to him, that the general consent of mankind in acknowledging one God does not prove that there is one, any more than the general consent of numberless nations in acknowledging several proves that there are several. He answers the objection by saying, that philosophers and wise men, in every nation and in every age, were of a different opinion from the vulgar, so that the heterodox opinion cannot pretend to have general consent on its side, since the opinions of the vulgar, opposed to those of philosophers and wise men, can be received into this reckoning no otherwise than like a multitude of noughts without any figure. This is strange reasoning to fall from the pen of so great a man. It is certain, that the orthodox belief maintained itself in some minds, perhaps in some nations, and pierced through all the darkness of ignorant ages; but yet polytheism, and the consequence of it, idolatry, were avowed and taught by legislators and by philosophers. Neither will it avail any thing to say, that these men had their inward, as well as their outward doctrine, and that they taught, in private, the contrary of what they taught in public. On this very supposition it will still follow, that polytheism and idolatry prevailed more easily, because they were more conformable to the natural conceptions of the human mind, than the belief of one first intelligent Cause, the sole creator, preserver, and governor of all things. It is absurd to say, that the consent of some wise men, and even of some nations, instructed and governed by them, in the acknowledgment of one Supreme Being, is a proof that this idea is innate in all men, or universally proportioned to the conceptions of all men, and to deny that the almost universal consent of mankind, in the acknowledgment of several gods, is a proof of the contrary.

If you are not very well satisfied with these theological reasonings, as I think you are not, you will be no better satisfied with the manner in which our archbishop attempts to prove that the world had a beginning. The question, which is commonly put to those who maintain the eternity of it, would be trifling, as well as trite, if it did not oblige the atheist to give an answer which implies, in his mouth, the greatest absurdity, and makes

him pronounce, in effect, his own condemnation. Tillotson takes this advantage, as I have done; but he throws it away, when he has taken it, by applying it against those who may think the world more ancient than the theological era makes it to be, though they do not believe it eternal. He asserts that the most ancient histories were written long after this era, and quotes to prove it, some verses of Lucretius, finely written, but very little to the purpose, because of no authority in this case.

> "——— Si nulla fuit genitalis origo
> Terrarum et cœli, semperque eterna fuêre;
> Cur supra bellum Thebanum, et funera Trojæ,
> Non alias alii quoque res cecinêre poëtæ?"

Men have been always fond, not only to carry the originals of their several nations as far back as they could, and to represent them, sometimes, as coeval with the world itself, but to establish their own, or the traditions which had come to them, as the most ancient of all traditions. Thus the Roman poet employed those of Greece to prove that the world had not begun very long before the wars of Thebes and of Troy. The world had a beginning, says the Jew; for there is neither history nor tradition more ancient than Moses; and we know by his writings how, and how long ago, the world was created. If we bring a Chinese into the scene, he will assure us that the world had a beginning; because the cycles, of three-score years each, in the chronological tables of his nation, do not rise any higher than Hoam-Ti, who reigned about four thousand four hundred years before our era, that from him to Xin-num, the successor of Fohi, there are not more than three hundred and eighty years, and that Fohi was the first that civilised mankind. It was he, will the Chinese continue to say, who left us the adorable and hitherto incomprehensible Yekin, in the explication of which our learned men have labored these two thousand six hundred years. It was Fohi and Xin-num who taught men the use of the plough, who invented letters, and to whom all arts and sciences owe their original. Let a learned Mexican come forward next, and he will assure you, not only, that the world began, but that the time when it began is known; for we had but nine kings before Montezuma, will this great chronologer say. Tenuch was the first of them, and the founder of our monarchy; our hieroglyphical annals rise no higher; we know nothing beyond him; this calculation is confirmed by that of our neighbors, whose traditions place the destruction of the last sun, and the beginning of this, but a little before our era. Let a Peruvian follow the Mexican, he will assure us, that the inca Manco-Capac preceded Atahualpa, about four hundred years; that he and his sister, Coya-Mama-Oella-Huaco, were sent, at that time, by their father, the

sun, to civilise mankind, who could not have been long in being, since they had neither civil polity nor religion, since they knew neither how to build houses, spin wool or cotton to cover their nakedness, nor to till their lands. These are the traditions of the east and of the west. The former make the world more ancient than those of the Jews, as they stand in the Hebrew, at least; the latter place the commencement of it about the beginning of the twelfth century of the Christian era, that is about the time of your king Louis le Gros, and of our first Norman princes. Our learned Europeans may laugh, as much as they please, at these learned Americans: but they must not be offended, if they are laughed at, in their turn, by those who think, that if Cadmus, the cook of a certain king of Sidon, carried the use of letters, and his son, or his grandson, Bacchus, the culture of the vine, to the Greeks three thousand years before Manca-Capac civilised the Peruvians, it may very well be, that the Atlantic, or some other nation still more unknown to us, had made all these improvements, by a long experience, three thousand years before the Greeks, or even their masters, who boasted of a much greater antiquity, the Egyptians.

A crowd of reflections presents itself; but these may serve to show how ridiculous it is, whilst we receive on the faith of universal tradition this fact, "the world had a beginning," to go about to fix the era of it according to those of any particular nations. The negative argument, "we have no memorials beyond such a time," proves nothing but our ignorance; and the positive argument, that "we have relations of the beginning of arts and sciences in several countries;" proves nothing more than what it is very needless to prove; I mean, that there was a time, when every one of these nations began to be civilised. Neither of these arguments is of weight against the atheist who asserts the eternity of the world. But they give him an advantage, such as it is, which bad arguments give frequently in polemical writings; and having refuted these, he may triumph, as if he had refuted all the rest, which is a practice very common among his adversaries the divines.

If the divine had not more at heart to establish the credit of Jewish traditions than the commencement of the world, he would not proceed as he does. He would not neglect the universal tradition of a naked fact, such as tradition may preserve, to insist on particular traditions of a fact so complicated with circumstances, that no tradition could preserve it. These circumstances might make the fact doubtful; the fact will never make them probable. Even that of the time, when the present system of things began, has been supported weakly, I will not, though, I think, I might say fraudulently, by Jewish rabbins and by Chris-

tian doctors, from Julius Africanus, and Eusebius, and George the monk, down to Stillingfleet, whom I mention, particularly, because Tillotson ventures to assert, that he has proved, in his Origines Sacræ, the chronological traditions of the Egyptians, and the Chaldeans, to agree with those of the Bible. If he had proved this, which he has not, most certainly, he would have proved nothing more than what the Mexicans assert, that the traditions of two or three neighboring nations, all derived probably enough from one original, are conformable to one another. But it is, indeed, too bold an imposition to pretend to prove, by descending into particulars of facts and dates, any thing of this kind. Our learned antiquaries have no other materials than a certain number of broken, incoherent, and precarious traditions. These they make to cohere, for the most part, by guess, and then drag them to a seeming conformity with the Mosaical system, which they assume, all along, to be true, whilst they pretend to prove it to be so by collateral evidence. I will only add, to show how impertinent all this admired learning ought to be deemed, that by little differences in the arrangement of the same materials, and by a no greater liberty of guessing, distinct, opposite, and yet equal probabilities may be made to result from them. I affirm this the more confidently, because I tried it once, as you may remember, and we both thought that the trial succeeded very plausibly.

But without insisting any longer on this head; to show how divines weaken the short and plain proof that we have of the beginning of the world, let us grant, for argument's sake, that the most ancient traditions are the Mosaical, and that arts and sciences have not been invented more than four or five thousand years, or more or less as they think fit. Will they prove, even by this concession, that the world has had a beginning? They cannot: for the atheist will object that he may have reason to think the world eternal, without being obliged to think the arts and sciences eternal likewise. He will maintain it to be indifferent, in his hypothesis, when or where they began; since at whatever era the divine places this beginning, an eternity must have preceded this era. The divine, therefore, will be obliged to show that it implies contradiction to assert that the world is from eternity, and not to assert that arts and sciences are so likewise. He will endeavor this by assuming, as Tillotson does, that arts and sciences are necessary to the well-being of mankind, and even to their being; that necessity, the great mother of industry and of invention, set mankind to work as soon, and as fast, as the species began and multiplied, in some places with more, in others with less, of these, but in all with as much as their real wants required. Since you agree, then, will the divine

say to the atheist, that arts and sciences began about the time we have fixed, the world must have begun about the time we have fixed likewise. This reasoning is commonly employed against those atheists who assume that the world is eternal. But without being one of their number, I venture to say that this reasoning is frivolous, and founded on a supposition which the men, w[illegible] make it, must know to be false. The different eras of arts and sciences, invented in some countries, and carried into others, are so distant, even according to the received chronology, that the men who dispensed with the want of them, during such long intervals, might have dispensed with it longer, and in many cases, always. Are there not nations, at this hour, whose originals are unknown to us, who may be the aborigines of the countries they inhabit, and who are ignorant, not only of all science, but of many arts supposed necessary; not only of letters, for instance, but of those, which serve to defend us against the inclemency of the air and the rigor of the seasons, by making clothes and building houses sufficient for this purpose? These arts must have their place, surely, among those which Tillotson reckons so necessary, or, at least, so useful to mankind, that they could not fail to be invented, nor when they were invented, to be preserved. But his reasoning will not hold here neither; for if these arts were ever known to the people, to whom they are now unknown, they may be totally lost, after having been once found: nay, they may have been found, lost, and found anew, an infinite number of times, in an eternal duration. If these arts were never known to the people to whom they are now unknown, it follows that mankind may dispense with the want of them during many ages, and therefore always. We may easily conceive that Samojedes, Hottentots, and other nations as barbarous and ignorant as these, have always been, and will always remain, in the same state of barbarity and ignorance.

Tillotson was led by his prejudices, and by the examples of men, much inferior to him, in the herd of divines, into the two absurdities I have observed to you already; into that of proving the commencement of the world by the authority of particular traditions, which considered separately amount to no proof at all, instead of resting his proofs solely on the authority of universal tradition: and into that of confounding traditions of opinion with traditions of fact. He insists not only on traditions which concur in affirming that the world began, but on those which enter into a detail of circumstances, concerning the manner in which it began. Nay, more; he joins the existence of God and the commencement of the world together, as if tradition was proper alike to prove both these truths. His proceeding is much the same with that of Maximus of Tyre, whom he cites,

after Grotius. Both he and Grotius might have quoted this rhetor, though they were far from doing so, against Eusebius, who was unwilling to allow that the Supreme Being was acknowledged by the heathens before Christianity had enlightened the world; but the quotation of him, on this occasion, proves nothing, and serves only to show that our divines declaim as loosely as the heathen philosopher. Maximus of Tyre alleges the universal consent of mankind in one law or tradition, so I believe those words Νομον και Λογον, should be translated "legem famamque," and not, as Tillotson translates them, "law and principle." Now this law and tradition, according to Maximus of Tyre, declares, that there is one God, the king and father of all things, and several other Gods, the sons of the Supreme, who take their parts with him in the government of the world. Maximus was a Platonician, and he meant, no doubt, to give reputation to the dogmas of his sect, by assuming them all to be received in one general tradition by the Greek and the Barbarian; by those who inhabit the continent, and by those who live on the coasts of the sea; by those who have wisdom, and by those who have none. Tillotson was a Christian, and he meant to make the dogmas of his sect, as well concerning the beginning of the world, as concerning the creator of it, to pass for those of universal tradition. If we suppose that the first men were led, instantly, by the phenomena, and without any other demonstration, to acknowledge a supreme intelligent cause, the opinion rose from the fact of which they were witnesses; but it was opinion still in them, though it became afterwards demonstrated knowledge. Now divines transpose this order, and make the creation of the world, which tradition vouches primarily, to be, as it were, a secondary tradition; that is, they make the tradition of fact to follow the opinion, instead of making the opinion to be founded on the fact. They give great advantage to the atheist, by blending all these things together, for the atheist will not, though the theist will, distinguish what they have confounded. He will look on all these different propositions alike, and as traditions only of different opinions.

After having said, what has been here said, concerning the advantage which, I apprehend, that divines give to atheists by the absurd manner in which they employ tradition, I will observe another advantage, which the atheist may take, from some abstract reasonings that they employ to support this tradition.—The theist is modest. He is content to know what God has done, and he acknowledges it, for that very reason, wise and good, right and fit to be done. But the divine is not so modest. It is not enough for him to know, that God made the world, and to fix the time when it was made; he presumes, with much theolo-

gical ostentation, to explain the motives that determined the Supreme Being to create the world and the inhabitants of it, men at least. The atheist objects that these motives must have been eternal, since the divine attributes, from which they are deduced, are certainly eternal, in the system of the divine; and that it is impossible, therefore, to conceive that the Supreme Being should neglect doing, during an eternity, what it was conformable to his wisdom and goodness, and suitable to his power from all eternity to do. The divine may say, and he will say, no doubt, that whenever God, who is himself eternal, had created the world, an eternity must have preceded this creation, and that the objection, the atheist makes, would be just as strong, if he assumed that the world began six millions of years sooner, as it is when he places the era of it according to the Jewish and Christian chronology. He will employ the same sort of reasoning, in this case, against the atheist, which the atheist employed against him in another; that is, in the case of the commencement of arts and sciences; he will put the atheist on proving that it implies contradiction to believe God eternal, and not to believe the eternity of the world. To this, it may be, the atheist would reply, that the contradiction in believing one and not believing the other arises, like a self-evident truth, from what the divine himself affirms, and that the evidence is too great to need any demonstration and therefore incapable of any, like many other truths of which we have an immediate intuitive perception. From hence the atheist would insist that all the motives, which the divine asserts a Supreme Being had to create the world in time, are unanswerable reasons to prove it eternal; arguments for his system, in part at least, and, as far as the eternity of the world is concerned, in the whole.

A theist, who stood by, might, perhaps, suggest to the divine an expedient whereby to get out of the difficulty wherein he has involved himself by presuming to specify the motives which the Supreme Being had to create the world in time. The theist would advise him, like a good ally, (for such he is sometimes to the divine, though he is never such to the atheist, as the divine is on some occasions,) he would advise, I say, the divine to keep a little more precision in the use of words. Sometimes the world stands for the whole universe, and sometimes for our planet only. The divine must understand it, as Moses does, and believe by consequence that the whole universe began to exist, when Moses tells him, that the sun, our earth, the other planets, in short our solar system, began to exist: for the legislator of the Jews included no other in his idea of the universe. He would advise the divine, therefore, to distinguish better between the universe and the world; to affirm that our planet, or, at most, our solar

system, began in time, which is the utmost that Moses can be understood to have meant, and to affirm nothing of the universe, of which Moses knew nothing, and he only knows that it is.—Thus the reasons he gives, why God created the world, we inhabit, no sooner, may be a little better supported than they can be on the supposition that he created nothing before it, and was the eternal cause of no such effects, as his physical attributes enabled, and his moral attributes required him to produce. The theist might add, that, though we should suppose the universe to be eternal, like its Author, the eternal effect of an eternal cause, nothing will hinder us from assuming at the same time, on the faith of tradition, as he does, or, on this and other foundations, as the divine does, that our world, and even our solar system began in time. A constant rotation from existence to non-existence, or from generation to dissolution, and so back again, maintains our world and the inhabitants of it in being. Why should not such a rotation of worlds and systems of worlds maintain the universe in being?

But it is time to consider the historical, as we have considered the traditional proofs, which the archbishop brings to the beginning of the world. I will quote his own words, as they stand in Barbeyrac's translation; for if I did not quote them, you would hardly believe that I make him say no more than he did say.—He says then, "We have likewise a history of the commencement of the world, the most ancient and the most credible that could be desired. This history is that of Moses, an author so ancient that no other can stand in competition with him, in this respect. I might add, that this writer has all the characters of a divine authority, and prove it by such good reasons, as would give a great weight to his testimony in the minds of all those who believe a God. But such arguments are not proper to be employed against the atheist with whom we dispute at present. I ask no more, than that the same credit may be given to Moses, as we give to every other historian. Now this cannot be refused him reasonably, since he is quoted by the most ancient heathen historians, and since the antiquity of his writings has never been contested by any of them, as Josephus maintains."

This is my text. I shall make some few remarks upon it, and this general remark in the first place. It has been said, truly enough, that the court of Rome has established many maxims and claims of right, by affirming them constantly and boldly against evident existing proofs of the contrary. The Jewish and the Christian church have proceeded by the same rule of policy, and the authority of the Pentateuch, to say nothing here of the other books of the Old Testament, has been established entirely and solely on the affirmation of the Jews, or, at best, on

seeming and equivocal proofs, such as Josephus brings against such evident marks of falsehood as can be objected to no other writings, except to professed romances, nor even always to them.

It was the pride of the Jews to believe themselves, and to make others believe if they could, not only that their nation was the elect people of God, but that it was of an immense antiquity, and that they possessed the most ancient of all authentic records. Josephus (who had as much of this pride about him as any Jew or Pharisee of them all, and who stuck, as little, at any absurdity, as any ancient or modern rabbin) endeavored to promote these opinions among the Greeks and the Romans by his writings, though with very little success. Tillotson, like other Christian doctors, had a better motive than that of mere ambition, though it was not quite foreign from ambition neither, to support the authority of the Pentateuch. Whether Jesus Christ, or St. Paul, abolished the ceremonial law of Moses, or whether the former grafted on this law, as the latter thought fit to graft on his gospel, let us leave it to divines to decide. In all cases Christianity was founded on Judaism, and the New Testament supposes the truth of the Old. Our divines, therefore, are obliged to support the Old, as well as they can, in order to support the New. The authority of these books is maintained, in some countries, by inquisitors and hangmen. In a country like ours where arguments alone can be employed, divines may be indulged in the use of all the good and the bad indifferently, that they may give up nothing; for where every part may be alike attacked, every part may be alike defended. Two cautions, however, these reverend persons would do well to observe. One to insist chiefly on the external proofs of the divine authenticity of the Scriptures, and to pour forth, on that head, all their stock of Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, and Latin, but to dwell very little on the internal marks of a divine character. They might silence those perhaps, on the first kind of proof, by their translations and commentaries, whom they will never convince, on the second, by fair reasoning; and might avoid a great deal of that blasphemy, which they talk on both; a circumstance, surely, that deserves some regard from them. Another caution is this, that they should make war rather defensively than offensively, that they should take the only true advantage of the discretion of their adversaries, which would be to return it with discretion; for their adversaries seldom speak out, nor push the instances and arguments they bring, as far as they might be carried. Instead of which these orthodox bullies affect to triumph over men, who employ but a part of their strength; tire them with impertinent paradoxes; and provoke them by unjust reflections, and, often, by the foulest language.

After this long, and, I hope, charitable remark, it is time to

consider how Tillotson proves that we have historical, as well as traditional, evidence of the beginning of the world. This evidence is that of Moses: and to give it the more weight, he insists on the great antiquity of the historian. This antiquity will not be disputed, perhaps, and it will be allowed that no other history of the same assumed antiquity has come down to us. But then it will be asked, what materials Moses could have before him when he wrote the book of Genesis, which is in some sort a preface to the Pentateuch, or, at least, the first chapters of it, wherein he relates most circumstantially the creation of the world, and the whole progress of that great event? Divines have their answer ready. Moses was not a cotemporary author, but he might write upon cotemporary authority. Twenty-five centuries passed indeed between the creation and him, but his materials were, notwithstanding that, extremely fresh and authentic, since they must have gone through very few hands, in ages when men lived so long, to come into his, whether we suppose them written or unwritten. This may be said, it has been often said, and always very weakly, to the purpose that is mentioned here; for if Moses had taken his materials from the mouth of Adam, himself, they would not have been sufficient vouchers of all that he relates. Adam might have related to him the passages of the sixth day, something even of his own creation, at least from the moment that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: but Adam could have told him nothing that preceded this, even on the sixth day, nor, by consequence, on the other five, wherein the whole material world was created. Moses, therefore, notwithstanding his antiquity, may afford an instance in proof of the universality of the tradition, but no more. His writings afford no historical evidence.

Our archbishop assures us, that he could have added to the antiquity of this historian certain characters of a divine authority, and have supported them by reasons which would give great weight to his testimony in the minds of all those who acknowledge the existence of God. It is pity he did not think fit to give these characters and reasons; since however improper it might have been to urge them against an atheist, who denies the existence of God, as well as the commencement of the world, they would certainly have been urged very properly against a theist, who, acknowledging both, believes nothing of the divine character of Moses. But he was too much attached to a rigorous precision, and used too much candor, in his reasoning, to mingle the atheist and the theist together in this dispute. All he desires is, what, he thinks, cannot be reasonably refused him, that we give the same credit to Moses, as we should give to any other historian. We will consider, then, in the last place, what characters

of a divine authority may be found in the writings of Moses, and, from this consideration, we shall find reason, perhaps, to be the less concerned that we have not those which Tillotson kept to himself on this occasion. In the mean time, let us continue to judge of Moses, as we should do of any historian, since it is all that is desired of us.

Now to constitute the authenticity of any history, these are some of the conditions necessary. It must be written by a cotemporary author, or by one who had cotemporary materials in his hands. It must have been published among men who were able to judge of the capacity of the author, and of the authenticity of the memorials on which he wrote. Nothing repugnant to the universal experience of mankind must be contained in it. The principal facts, at least, which it contains, must be confirmed by collateral testimony, that is, by the testimony of those who had no common interest of country, of religion, or of profession, to disguise or falsify the truth. That Moses was not a cotemporary author is allowed, and that he could have no cotemporary authority, for the greatest part of what he advanced concerning the creation, is proved. Thus far then his writings have no historical authenticity. Let us see whether they have it in any of the other respects which I have mentioned. Were they published among people able to judge of them and of their author? Huetius, who wrote an evangelical demonstration, and died a sceptic, admits, in his demonstration, that a book, to be deemed authentic, must have been received, as such, in the age which followed immediately the publication of it, and in all the ages which followed this. Has it been sufficiently proved, that the Mosaical history was so received? I believe not. There was, it is said, by Abbadie, I think, a law of Moses, before Esdras, before Josiah, and even before David, since this famous prophet and king speaks continually of the law of God; and since all the other prophets quote the most important passages of Deuteronomy. The Pentateuch must have been in their hands, since they show, very clearly, that they had an exact knowledge of the facts contained in Genesis, the least circumstances of which are referred to by them as circumstances that no man could be ignorant of. If Moses wrote the history contained in the book of Genesis, he wrote all the other books that compose the Pentateuch. Abbadie assumes that this cannot be denied, and that Moses must needs have been a good scribe, since it was he who recorded, in writing, the words of the covenant made at Horeb.

It would be hard to find an example of greater trifling: for when we have allowed that the authors of the Old Testament, from David down to Esdras, speak not only of the law, but refer

to many of the facts related in the Pentateuch, it will not follow necessarily that the Pentateuch, which we have in our hands, was published in the time of Moses or immediately after it. Much of the history, and some of the law, perhaps, contained in the writings ascribed to Moses, came down to those who quote them, by traditions of uncertain original, though they were all alike ascribed, by the Jews, to the same legislator. This cannot appear improbable to any one who considers, that establishments said to be made according to the law of Moses, when the custom of reading this law once in seven years to the people was neglected, and when they had actually no body of law extant amongst them, are mentioned sometimes in the Bible. This had been the case when Hilkiah found the law in the temple, which had been lost long before, and continued to be so, during the first eighteen or twenty years of good Josiah's reign. That the book, thus found, contained nothing but the law of Moses, strictly so called, or than the recapitulation of it, made in Deuteronomy, not the Mosaical history, we may, nay we must conclude, from the little time that the reading the book in the presence of the king, and before it was sent by his order to the prophetess Huldah, took up.

The Jews had an oral, as well as a written law, and the former has been deemed even more important than the latter. The former however consisted of nothing more than traditions, which the rabbin Juda Hakkodosh, or the holy, compiled, six or seven centuries after Esdras had compiled the canon of the Scriptures. In short, there seems to have been two collections of ancient Jewish traditions made at different times; and the authors, who preceded Esdras, might quote those of one sort, as authentic facts and divine laws, just as well as the doctors, who preceded rabbi Juda, quoted those of the other, as a commentary on them given by God himself on Mount Sinai. It will be said, I know, that the authenticity of the Pentateuch, given us by Esdras, is sufficiently proved, by the conformity it has, in most instances, with the Pentateuch of the Samaritans, that is of the Cuthæans, a people sent from the other side of the Euphrates by Salmanasar to inhabit the country of Samaria, which he had depopulated. This people knew nothing of the Mosaical law till Asarhaddon, the successor of Salmanasar, sent a priest of the Jews to instruct them in it, who might carry, for aught we know, a Pentateuch written in ancient Hebrew characters with him. I enter into no examination of these precarious accounts, lest I should go out of my depth; neither need I to do so: for if we allow that the Pentateuch was public before the time of Esdras, Josiah, or even David, will it follow that it was so as early as would be necessary to answer that condition of authenticity, which we speak of here? Was there not time more than enough between Moses and David

to make fabulous traditions pass for authentic history? Did it take up near so much to establish the divine authority of the Alcoran among the Arabs, a people not more incapable to judge of Mahomet and his book, than we may suppose the Israelites to judge of Moses, and his book, if he left any, whether of law alone, or of history and law both?

The time that the Israelites passed from the Exode under Moses, and the four centuries that they passed afterwards under their judges, may be compared, well enough, to the heroical age of the Greeks. Marvellous traditions descended from both, and their heroes were much alike. Those of the Greeks were generally bastards of some god or other, and those of the Jews were always appointed by God to defend his people, and to destroy their enemies. But Aod, one of these, was an assassin, and Jephtha, another, was a captain of banditti, as David was, till, by the help of the priests, he obtained the crown; after which, under him, and his son Solomon, the government of the Israelites took a better form; arts and sciences were cultivated; and their historical age might begin. It has been urged, by those who scruple little what they say, that the four centuries, which the Israelites passed under their judges, were times of adversity and oppression, wherein they had something else to do than to invent fabulous traditions, or that if any such were invented so near the times of Moses and Joshua, they must have been detected by the Israelites themselves, who would have been far from encouraging traditions so injurious to neighboring nations, of whom they had reason to stand in awe. Thus it seems that times of ignorance, barbarity, and confusion, were the most unlikely to give rise and currency to fables, and the most proper to preserve the truth of traditions, which must, for this ridiculous reason, have come down uncorrupted and unmixed. One can hardly imagine any thing so extravagant, and yet I can quote, from Abbadie, a way of reasoning that is more so. You have thought, I doubt not, hitherto, like other men of sense, that the consistency of a narration is one mark of its truth; but this great divine will teach you, that the inconsistency, not the consistency, is such a mark. Moses, he says, is so inconsistent with himself, that he establishes the existence of one God, and then talks as if there were many. He introduced Jacob wrestling against God, and the mortal comes off victorious. Could he have advanced such an apparent absurdity, if the fact had not been true? He advanced it, because he knew it to be true, though he did not understand it. Just so he talked of several lords, who appeared to Abraham under the forms of angels, without knowing what he said, though Abbadie knew that the angel of the covenant was one of them: by which I profess myself not to know what Abbadie meant,

or what they mean, who say, that this angel was the Son of God. Thus a new rule is added to the canon of criticism by this learned divine.

Another condition of the authenticity of any human history, and such alone we are to consider in this place, is, that it contain nothing repugnant to the experience of mankind. Things repugnant to this experience are to be found in many, that pass, however, for authentic; in that of Livy, for instance: but then these incredible anecdotes stand by themselves, as it were, and the history may go on without them. But this is not the case of the Pentateuch, nor of the other books of the Old Testament. Incredible anecdotes are not mentioned seldom and occasionally in them. The whole history is founded on such, it consists of little else, and if it were not a history of them, it would be a history of nothing. These books become familiar to us before we have any experience of our own. The strange stories they relate, represented in pictures or in prints, are the amusements of our infancy; we read them, as soon as we learn to read, and they make their impressions on us, like the tales of our nurses. The latter are soon effaced, though sometimes, with difficulty; because no one takes care to preserve them, and care is taken, in a good education, to destroy them. But the others are industriously renewed, and the most superstitious credulity grows up along with us. We may laugh at Don Quixote, as long as we please, for reading romances till he believed them to be true histories, and for quoting archbishop Turpin with great solemnity; but when we speak of the Pentateuch, as of an authentic history, and quote Moses, as solemnly as he did Turpin, are we much less mad than he was? When I sit down to read this history with the same indifference as I should read any other, for so it ought to be read, to comply with all that archbishop Tillotson requires of us, I am ready to think myself transported into a sort of fairy land, where every thing is done by magic and enchantment; where a system of nature, very different from ours, prevails; and all I meet with is repugnant to my experience, and to the clearest and most distinct ideas I have. Two or three incredible anecdotes, in a decade of Livy, are easily passed over; I reject them, and I return, with my author, into the known course of human affairs, where I find many things extraordinary, but none incredible. I cannot do this in reading the history of the Old Testament. It is founded in incredibility. Almost every event contained in it is incredible in its causes or consequences, and I must accept or reject the whole, as I said just now. I can do no otherwise, if I act like an indifferent judge, and if I give no more credit to Moses than to any other historian. But I need say no more on this head. No one, except here and there a divine, will presume to

say, that the histories of the Old Testament are conformable to the experience of mankind and to the natural course of things. I except here and there a divine, because I remember one, who, speaking of the conversation of the serpent with the first woman, and the other circumstances of the fall of man, (that he may avoid the explanations given by the rabbins of this story, or that of Philo, a little less extravagant than the others, all which turned the whole into allegory,) has the front to assert, that there is nothing incredible in this relation, literally understood.

The next condition of historical authenticity is this, that the facts, the principal facts at least, be confirmed by collateral testimony. By collateral testimony I mean the testimony of those, who had no common interest of country, of religion, or of profession, to disguise or falsify the truth, as I expressed myself above. Thus too it is necessary that we express ourselves in order to prevent a common theological sophism. Huetius says, in the place to which I have referred already, that a history is deemed to be true, when other histories relate the same facts, and in the same manner. But it is not enough that the same facts are related, even in cotemporary, or nearly cotemporary books; since if the authors of these books were such as I describe, all these testimonies would be in effect but one, as all those of the Old Testament, which confirm the Mosaical history, are in truth but one, the testimony of Moses himself.

Josephus attempts to support this history by collateral testimonies, those of Egyptians, Phœnicians, Chaldæans, and even Greeks. But these testimonies, were they never so full to his purpose, would cease to be collateral testimonies, by coming through him who had a common interest of country and religion to disguise and to falsify truth. If we examine the use he makes of the fragments he cites from Manetho, concerning the shepherd-kings, and many other citations in his works, we shall find abundant reason to suspect him of both. Eusebius is a collateral witness, as little as he, and yet from these two quivers principally have all the arrows, employed to defend the authenticity of the Old Testament, been drawn. They are blunt indeed, and nothing can be more trifling than the use that has been made of them by ancient and modern scholars. Whenever these men find, in profane history or tradition, the least circumstance that has any seeming relation to sacred history, they produce it as collateral testimony, and sometimes even the similitude of sounds is employed for the same purpose, with a great apparatus of learning. But nothing can be more impertinent than this learning. The man who gives the least credit to the Mosaic history for instance, will agree, very readily, that these five books contain traditions of a very great antiquity, some of which were

preserved and propagated by other nations, as well as by the Israelites, and by other historians, as well as by Moses. Many of them may be true too; but, I think, they will not serve to vouch for one another in the manner they must do to become such collateral testimonics as are required. That the Israelites had a leader and legislator called Moses, is proved by the consent of foreign, whom I call collateral, witnesses. Be it so. But surely it will not follow, that this man conversed with the Supreme Being face to face, which these collateral witnesses do not affirm. The Israelites were an Egyptian colony and conquered Palestine. Be it so. It will not follow, that the red sea opened a passage to them, and drowned the Egyptians who pursued them. It will not follow, that the possession of the land of Canaan was promised to their father Abraham, four hundred years before, as a consequence of the vocation of this patriarch, and of an alliance which God made with him and with his family. A great number of instances might be brought of the same kind; and such instances might serve to prove the authenticity of those histories, which the monk of Viterbo endeavored to impose on the world under the names of Megasthenes and other ancient writers, just as well as they serve to prove the authenticity of those which we ascribe to Moses, or Joshua, or any other supposed writers of the Old Testament.

The three or four ancient neighboring nations, of whom we have some knowledge, seemed to have had a common fund of traditions, which they varied according to their different systems of religion, philosophy, and policy. We may observe this, if we compare the traditions of the Arabs, descended from the Ishmaelites, with those of the Jews, descended from the Israelites. Human tradition for human tradition, the former deserves as much credit as the latter. Why then do we put so great a difference between them? Have we any reason for it, except the affirmation of one of the parties? Abbadie will tell you that we have, because the Jews were a people of sages and philosophers. The best excuse, that can be made for the poor man, is to say, that he became, soon afterwards, mad enough to study the Apocalypse, and to believe that he found a hidden sense in it. The truth is, that ignorance and superstition, pride, injustice, and barbarity were the peculiar characteristics of this people of sages and philosophers. The principles of their religion formed them to every part of this character. Their priests, who had the care of their religion and the keeping of their records, as we are told, maintained them in it; and whether their history was such, as we see it, before the days of Esdras and Nehemias, or nothing more than broken traditions, collected and put together by them in the present form, thus much is certain, that the same

spirit breathes through the whole, and that the character of the nation appears evidently in every part of the composition. It has been said, I know, of the pride of this people particularly, that their Scriptures were not contrived to flatter them in it, since their revolts, their apostacies, and the punishments which followed them, as well as the discourses of their prophets, filled with the most mortifying reproaches, and the most terrible threatenings on the part of God, are set forth in these books with every aggravating circumstance. But this evasion will strengthen, instead of weakening, what I have said. It is true that the Jews are often represented in them like rebellious children, but they are always represented like favorite children. They abandon God's law and his worship; they depose him; they choose another king in his place; still his predilection for this chosen people subsists, and if he punishes, it is only, like an indulgent parent, to reclaim them, and to show them the same favor as before. In short, he renews all his promises to them; future glory and triumph; a Messiah; a kingdom that shall destroy all others, and last eternally, "consumet universa regna et ipsum stabit in eternum." Thus was the pride of this people kept up by incredible stories about the past, and incredible prophecies about the future; and with their pride, even to this day, their ignorance, their enthusiastical superstition, and in principle, if not in effect for want of power, their injustice and their barbarity. Thus we see that the authenticity of the Mosaical history and the other histories of the Old Testament has no sufficient collateral testimony, but rests, solely or principally, on the good faith of a people who deserve, on many accounts, to be trusted the least; and of whom we may say, that it is improbable their history should have been written, and impossible that it should have been preserved, with a strict regard to truth.

I might rest the matter here, if it did not come into my thoughts to expose a sophism that has been employed by those who defend the authenticity of this history. If they cannot show that it is confirmed by collateral and foreign testimony, cotemporary or nearly cotemporary, they hope to confirm it by assuming that relics continued long among the Jews, and that festivals and ceremonious institutions continue still, all which are so many cotemporary proofs; since they must have been cotemporary, in their origin, with the facts to which they are relative. The proof is precarious, in the mouth of one of your divines, who have abused it to establish so many pious frauds, and the belief of so many foolish legends; but it becomes contemptible, when it is employed by one of our divines, who declaim so much against the use that has been made of it in your church. With what face can he talk to us, like Abbadie, of the rod of Aaron,

of the pot of manna, or of the figures that represented rats and the privy parts of the Philistines? Would the man prove his sincerity to us, as he proves that of Moses, by his contradictions and inconsistencies?

The relics, so long preserved, exist nowhere out of the books whose historical authenticity they are advanced to prove, and if they did exist, we should be obliged to reject them, or to admit many of the grossest impositions that have passed on popular credulity. Did not the priests of Delphi show the very stone that Saturn swallowed, when he intended to devour Jupiter? Was there not an olive tree at Troezena or somewhere in Greece, in the time of Pausanias, which blossomed and bore fruit, which had been the club of Hercules, and which this hero had planted, just as Joseph of Arimathæa planted his stick, that became a miraculous thorn at Glastonbury? The institution of festivals and ceremonies proves as little as relics. Though supposed cotemporary, they may owe their original to some fabulous traditions; or if really cotemporary, they serve as well to prove all the ridiculous circumstances, that have been blended with the tradition, in process of time, as the fact which they were designed to record. The Israelites had their sabbath of days, their sabbath of years, and their weeks of years. Will it follow that God was employed six days in the laborious work of the creation, and that he rested the seventh? The passover and other institutions served to commemorate the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt, and their transmigration into Palestine. But will they serve likewise to commemorate all the incredible circumstances which had been added to the tradition of a very credible, and, no doubt, of a very true event? Collateral testimony proves the event; but these supposed cotemporary institutions cannot stand in lieu of collateral testimony to prove the circumstances. Whether the event be true, or whether it be false, such institutions will confound the truth of the event with the falsehood of the circumstances in one case, and will vouch for both alike, in the other. The death of Moses, who certainly died, is confounded with the circumstances that accompany it in the last chapter of Deuteronomy; circumstances absurd and profane; and yet, if the Jews commemorate the true fact, they must commemorate, on this principle, all the circumstances that are related in the Bible, and in their oral traditions. A good iman believes piously the ascension of Mahomet, on the faith of his traditions, and of the ceremony, by which it is annually commemorated. The ascension and the circumstances of it are false alike, the ceremony vouches for all alike; and he must believe, not only the ascension of Mahomet, but that the angel Gabriel brought, by night, to his sepulchre, a flying horse, called Borak, which the prophet

mounted and rode on horseback into heaven. Shall the annual ceremony, which confirms the whole account alike, make us believe that Mahomet went to heaven, or hinder us from placing this story in the same class with that of Astolphus and his hypogryphe? We shall believe no part of it; but the good iman is obliged to believe the whole.

The little I have said makes it plain enough, and more particulars in so plain a case would be superfluous, that if we take Tillotson at his word, if we give only the same credit to Moses, which we give to every other historian, and no more, his history cannot pass, according to any rule of good sense or true criticism for authentic. But other divines are not so generous; they give up nothing; and, therefore, when they cannot maintain weak arguments of one kind, they have recourse to another hypothesis, and affirm this history to have been written by men under the immediate influence of divine inspiration, and to be, therefore, of divine authority. For this they have the word of Josephus, and the unanimous attestation of the Jewish and Christian churches. But all this will not amount to proof, unless it may be said, that they who cannot give to this history even the appearance of human, can give it the appearance of divine authenticity. That sameness of spirit, which runs through all this history, and which appears in all the writings of the Jewish prophets, confirms one thing that Josephus says. A distinct order of men, priests and prophets, among the Jews, as well as the Egyptians, published the sacred writings of these people, and these writings were received on the faith of this order of men, who had the same temptations to impose, and the same opportunities of imposing, in both countries. Josephus boasts of the integrity of these men, and the strict regard which they paid to truth, in Egypt, as well as in Palestine, and his testimony will be of as much weight in favor of one, as in favor of the other, that is, of none at all. The sacred writings of the Egyptians had no more authority out of Egypt than the polytheism, superstition, and idolatry of other nations gave them; and the sacred writings of the Jews were never received as such, out of Judea, till the propagation of Christianity carried them abroad. Christianity abrogated the law, and confirmed the history of Moses, from the time, at least, when St. Paul undertook, like a true cabalistical architect, with the help of type and figure, to raise a new system of religion on the old foundations.

No proof of this kind, therefore, affording pretence to say, that the Scriptures of the Israelites, any more than those of the Egyptians, are of divine authority; our divines turn themselves to declaim on certain undoubted marks of it, which are to be found, they assume, in the books themselves that the canon of the Old

Testament contains. Let us say something on this subject. It deserves our utmost attention. Let us compare some of these supposed marks of a divine original with those of a human original, which will stare us in the face, and point out, plainly, the fraud and the imposture. I use these words with great freedom. I think myself obliged, in conscience, to do so, and before I conclude, you shall judge of the reasons for which I think in this manner and hold this language.

We are told, in some theological declamations, that the revelation made to the Israelites and taught in their Scriptures, corrected the false ideas of paganism, as it appears by the examples of Socrates and Plato, who borrowed, from the writings of the Jews, the best and soundest parts of their philosophy, which has been proved over and over by learned antiquaries.* It is a sufficient answer to this, to say, that the fact is false. Christians, as well as Jews, have asserted it; but it is false to say, that they have proved it. Neither Plato, nor Socrates, nor Pythagoras, nor the Egyptians and Chaldeans, their masters, appear to have borrowed any thing from the Jews, though Moses had been instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and though the Jews, both before and after Esdras, borrowed evidently, as evidently as any such thing can appear at this distance of time, from the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and even the Greek philosophers, from Plato and from Zeno for instance. At other times we are told, that the soul of man knows neither whence it came nor whither it is to go, that these are points concerning which human reason must be always in doubt, and which were clearly determined by the Jewish revelation. We find this asserted very magisterially, but, if we have recourse to the Bible, we find no such thing. Moses did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor the rewards and punishments of another life, though it is possible he might have learned these doctrines from the Egyptians, who taught them very early, and yet not so early, perhaps, as they taught that of the unity of God. When I say that Moses did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor future rewards and punishments, my reason for it is, that he taught neither, when he had to do with a people, whom even a theocracy could not restrain, and on whom, therefore, terrors of punishment future as well as present, eternal as well as temporary, could never be too much multiplied, nor too strongly inculcated. Moses, the greatest of their prophets, knew nothing of this immortality, and Solomon, the wisest of their kings, decides against it. The texts in Ezekiel, and others, which are alleged to prove that this doctrine was part of the Jewish system, are too modern to

* Vide Abbadie.

prove it, and they admit, besides, of a different sense. In short, this doctrine does not appear to have prevailed amongst them, till they became acquainted with Greek philosophy, and instead of lending to Plato, borrowed from him. This pretended mark of divinity may be ascribed therefore, if it be one, to pagan philosophy, but it cannot be so to Jewish theology; and, I cannot help using an expression of one of these declaimers,* who write as if they were preaching, and to apply it to the whole tribe. They would do well to think a little better beforehand, and to respect their readers a little more.

When these men talk of the characters of a divine original, which are to be found in the books of the Old Testament, they must mean nothing, or they must mean to say, that these books are more perfect, according to our ideas of human perfection, whether we consider them as books of law or of history, than any other writings that are avowedly human. Now if this be what they mean, nothing can be more false. They cannot deny that pagan philosophers enjoined a general benevolence, a benevolence not confined to any particular society of men, but extended to the great commonwealth of mankind, as a first principle of the law of our nature. The law of the Jews exacted from them all the duties necessary to maintain peace and good order among themselves, and if this be a mark of divinity, the laws, which rapparees and banditti establish in their societies, have the same. But the first principles, and the whole tenor of the Jewish laws, took them out of all moral obligations to the rest of mankind, and if Moses did not order them to have no benevolence for any, who were not Jews, "erga nullum hominem benevolos esse," as Lysimachus pretended, yet is it certain, that their law, their history, and their prophecies, determined them to themselves a chosen race, distinct from the rest of mankind in the order of God's providence, and that they were far from owing to other men, what other men owed to them and to one another. This produced a legal injustice and cruelty in their whole conduct, and there is no part of their history wherein we shall not find examples of both, authorised by their law, and pressed upon them by their priests and their prophets.

In the systems of pagan philosophy we are exhorted, says another of these declaimers, to love virtue for her own sake; but the Jewish divines, rising much higher, exhorted us to love virtue for the sake of God. But can there be any thing so impiously interested and craving, as the sentiments ascribed to the patriarchs by Moses, and the principles of his own law? "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, and will

* Abbadie.

give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee."* This was Jacob's vow, and the conditional engagement which he took with God. If we turn to the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, we shall find that Moses on the renewal of the covenant between God and the people, employs no arguments, to induce the latter to a strict observation of it, of an higher nature than promises of immediate good, and threatenings of immediate evil. They are exhorted to keep the law; not for the sake of the law, not for the sake of God, but for considerations of another kind, and wherein not only their wants were to be supplied, but all their appetites and passions to be gratified. If they hearkened diligently to the voice of the Lord, they were to be set on high above all the nations of the earth; they were to be the head, and not the tail; to be above only, and not beneath; all the people of the earth were to fear them; all their enemies were to be smitten before their face, and they who came out against them one way, were to fly before them seven. These were objects of ambition. Their basket and their store were to be blessed, they were to grow rich, they were to lend to many nations, and to borrow from none. These were objects of avarice. They were to be blessed every where, in the city and in the field, in the fruit of their bodies, in the fruit of their ground, and in the fruit of their cattle, and of their flocks of sheep. These were objects of all their other appetites and passions. God purchased, as it were, the obedience of a people, he had chosen long before, by this mercenary bargain. It was ill kept on their part; and the law, with all these sanctions, was continually violated, sometimes rejected, and had in no degree a force sufficient to maintain itself in observation and reverence.

The most excellent constitutions of human government and systems of human law become often useless, and even hurtful, either in a natural course of things, or by extraordinary conjunctures, which the wisdom of legislators could not foresee. One of the most conceivable perfections of a law is, that it be made with such a foresight of all possible accidents, and with such provisions for the due execution of it, in all cases, that the law may be effectual to govern and direct these accidents, instead of lying at the mercy of them. Such a law would produce its effect, by a certain moral necessity resulting from itself, and not by the help of any particular conjuncture. We are able to form some general notions of laws thus perfect; but to make them is

* Gen. vi, 28.

above humanity. Another of the most conceivable perfections of a law consists in the clearness and precision of its terms, and, even in this, the greatest legislators have often failed. The terms become equivocal or obscure, if they were not so originally, by the endeavors of those who fear the law, to elude it, and of those who get by their explanations or judgments, to perplex the meaning of it. But that which is ideal perfection not real among men, will be found, no doubt, and ought to be expected, when God is the legislator. If it is not so found, all that can be said about marks of divinity in any law, that pretends to be revealed and enacted by God, is mere cant.

To apply these reflections the more strongly, it will be proper to consider the law of Moses, relatively to the first of the perfections mentioned, as a law given to the Israelites alone, and to consider, relatively to the second, the whole body of their law, and their history, which is a sort of commentary on their law, not only as given to them, but as given to all mankind, for purposes the most important to their common welfare. If eternal Wisdom dictated the laws and inspired these historians and prophets, in all their writings, eternal Wisdom knew all the uses they were to serve in time; and by consequence, whether we regard the Jewish economy alone, or that of Judaism and Christianity together, the whole system of law, history, and prophecy, must be exactly proportioned, as the means to all these ends.

On the first head we cannot read the Bible without being convinced, that no law ever operated so weak and so uncertain an effect, as the law of Moses did. Far from prevailing against accidents and conjunctures, the least was sufficient to interrupt the course and to defeat the designs of it; to make that people not only neglect the law, but cease to acknowledge the legislator. To prevent this, was the first of these designs, and if the second was, as it was no doubt, and as it is the design or pretence of all laws, to secure the happiness of the people, this design was defeated, as fully as the other; for the whole history of this people is one continued series of infractions of the law and of national calamities. So that this law, considered as the particular law of this nation, has proved more ineffectual than any other law, perhaps, that can be quoted. If this be ascribed to the hardness of heart and obstinacy of the people, in order to save the honor of the law, this honor will be little saved, and its divinity ill maintained. This excuse might be admitted in the case of any human law; but we speak here of a law supposed to be dictated by divine wisdom, which ought, and which would have been able, if it had been such, to keep in a state of submission to it, and of national prosperity, even a people rebellious and obstinate enough to break through any other. If it be said, that the law

became ineffectual by the fault of those who governed the people, their judges and their kings, let it be remembered that these judges and kings were of God's appointment, for the most part at least; that he himself is said to have been their king, during several ages; that his presence remained amongst them, even after they had deposed him; and that the high priest consulted him, on any emergency, by the Urim and Thummim. Occasional miracles were wrought to enforce the law, but this was a standing miracle that might serve both to explain and enforce it, by the wisdom and authority of the legislator, as often as immediate recourse to him was necessary. Can it be denied, that the most imperfect system of human laws would have been rendered effectual by such means as these?

It may not be amiss here to compare the effect of this law, before the captivity of Babylon, with that which it had afterwards. Ten tribes of this chosen people had been, for their disobedience, dispersed, and, we may say, lost in the east, long before the reign of Nebuchodonosor. This prince completed the ruin of the whole nation. He burned their temple, and their city, and carried the two remaining tribes into captivity. This captivity is said to have lasted but seventy years, and the Jews had carried into it so little respect for their law, so little regard to their history, and so little trust in the prophecies, which had been published both before and during this time, that they seemed to have forgot them all when Cyrus gave them permission to return to their country, and to rebuild their temple. He did more than give them permission; he gave them encouragement, and, among other instances of it, he restored the sacred vessels, which had been taken from them. What happened on this great revolution? Zorobabel gathered, with much trouble, a small number of the Jews, who were willing to return into their own country on this great revolution, and even these were the dregs of the people. The most considerable of them, and, among these, twenty of the four-and-twenty orders of priests that had been carried to Babylon, chose rather to stay there than to return to the holy city, though that was the place appointed by God for their sacrifices, and the most august ceremonies of their religion. Fourscore years intervened between the return of Zorobabel and the arrival of Esdras at Jerusalem. The temple and the city, probably, had been rebuilt, but the law cannot be said to have been restored. Many things, directly contrary to it, were practised openly and without scruple. Thus, for example, not only the people, but the Levites and the priests, married strange women, women who were not of their own country. Esdras, and Nehemias after him, neglected nothing to restore and preserve the observation of the law; and for this purpose they took means

very different from those which Moses had instituted, and much more effectual. One of these means, and perhaps the most effectual, was the institution of synagogues, which became so numerous, that wherever there were ten Jews, it is said, there was a synagogue. In these the law was read and explained once every week; whereas it was to be read but once in seven years, and the people were obliged to go up to Jerusalem to hear it, according to the Mosaic institution. The consequence was, that, notwithstanding some schisms, some apostacies, and other revolutions, which happened in the church and state, the Jews, in general, signalised themselves by a greater and more constant attachment to their religion and law.

Another perfection of the law consists in the clearness and precision of the terms; and, in these respects, we propose to consider this body of history, of prophecy, and of law, relatively not to the Jews alone, but to the rest of the world likewise. Now the language in which this law was given, and in which we must suppose that the histories and prophecies were written, as well as the law, unless we suppose these to have been written in, or after the time of Esdras, is, the learned say, of all languages the most loose and equivocal; and the style and manner of writing of the sacred authors, whoever they were, or whenever they lived, increase the uncertainty and obscurity even of any other language. How should it be otherwise, when the same passages may be taken in historical, mystical, literal, and allegorical senses, and when those who wrote them knew so little what they wrote, that they foretold some future, when they imagined they were relating some past, event? Lord Bacon, indeed, says that the sacred authors had a special privilege of recording the future, as well as the past, in history. But I suppose his lordship to have been no more in earnest when he said this, than he was in writing his Christian paradoxes. To supply these defects, the Jews have recourse to an oral law, and Christians to the decisions of councils. Strange methods indeed! History may explain or control tradition, but it is quite absurd to explain or control history by tradition. Councils were composed of men, whose pretensions to inspiration deserve nothing but our contempt, and, therefore, it is equally absurd to explain or control the word of God, by the judgment of these men, whether in their assemblies, or separately. St. Jerome complains, in one of his letters,* that they dragged the text to favor their particular sentiments, how repugnant soever to it. But this text does not seem to want so much dragging. The ambiguity of it makes it supple enough, and sentiments the most contrary to one another

* Ad Paul.

are equally well supported by it. If we add to these considerations that of the infinite number of copies, of version, and of versions of versions, which have given occasion to many alterations and interpolations, that are to be found, without going to Spinoza, to Hobbes, or to the fanciful author of the pre-adamitical system, we must be, I think, convinced that the Bible, which we call the word of God, is as little fit, by the manner in which it has been preserved, to be a uniform foundation of universal religion, as by the manner in which it was written and first published to the world.

Divines have their answer ready, and I hear, methinks, a great bishop of your church ask me, with that air of superiority to which no man of his age had a better claim, whether the authenticity of these books diminishes, because some explanatory additions may have been inserted, because some errors may have slipped by accident into the text, or because the mistakes of copyists have given occasion to various readings? Show me, says the right reverend person, if you can, any law, any doctrine, any ceremony, any miracle, or any prophecy, that has been added! Are not all the writings of the profane authors, whom you deem authentic, come down to you in the same manner as those of the holy penmen? I reply, my objection and my complaint are, that the manner in which these books were written, were published, and have been preserved, make it impossible to do this. Could we do it, could we distinguish between what is original and what not, the objection would vanish and the complaint cease. But both will remain in force till then; because of the vast difference that there is between the importance of these and of all other writings. The laws of Plato, the odes of Horace, and the history of Livy, may have been corrupted without any ill consequences to those who read them. But the same cannot be said of the laws of Moses, of the psalms of David, and of the history of the Old Testament.

I have been long enough on the defensive. It is time I should attack in my turn, and show you for what reasons I cannot believe that the Pentateuch, and the other books of the Old Testament, were written under a divine influence, and have any right to be called the word of God. There may be some defects in human laws, some falsities or mistakes in human histories, and yet both of them may deserve all the respect and all the credit, on the whole, that the writings of fallible men can deserve. But any one defect, any one falsity, or mistake, is sufficient to show the fraud and imposture of writings that pretend to contain the infallible word of God. Now there are gross defects, and palpable falsehoods, in almost every page of the Scriptures, and the whole tenor of them is such as no man, who acknowledges a Supreme,

All-perfect Being, can believe it to be his word. This I must prove; and when I have done so, divines may call me theist, or atheist, if they please. I shall not be ashamed of the first character, and shall leave them to purge themselves of one as absurd as the last.—That the Jews held the unity of God is true, and that their father Abraham might have learned this doctrine among the Egyptians, though it has been said, very foolishly, that he acquired great wealth by instructing that people in philosophy and the other sciences, is true likewise; but it will not follow that he, or his posterity, adored the true God. There are many passages in Job, in Isaiah, in the Psalms, and in other parts of the Old Testament, which give most sublime ideas of the majesty of the Supreme Being, and which have been sounded, for that reason, very high. But it will not be hard to quote Mahometan, and even Pagan writers, who have spoken of him with as much nobleness of style, and with as much dignity, as any of these; whilst, on the other hand, it will be easy to quote many things, imputed to the Supreme Being by these, at least as unworthy of him, as any which the Mahometans, or even the most extravagant of the Pagans, invented. Sublime expressions, concerning the Deity, may serve to show, that the imaginations of those who used them, were heated by the enthusiasm of poetry and devotion; they will not prove the writers to have been divinely inspired; and it will become nothing less than blasphemy to assert that they were so, when they impute, at the same time, such things to the Divinity as would bring disgrace on humanity.

I know, for I can demonstrate by connecting the clearest and most distinct of my real ideas, that there is a God, a first intelligent Cause of all things, whose infinite wisdom and power appear evidently in all his works, and to whom, therefore, I ascribe, most rationally, every other perfection, whether conceivable or not conceivable by me. A book is put into my hands, which is, I am told, and have been told from my youth, the word of this God, and wherein I shall find the whole scheme of things which he has established, and the whole economy of his providence.—What I learned before by rote, I consider with more attention, and am far from finding in it the Supreme Being, whose existence and attributes I demonstrate. The scene opens, indeed, by the creation, and this creation is ascribed to one God; that of the material world, at least: for when this God proceeds to the creation of man, he calls on other Beings, we know not by the text how many, to co-operate with him, and to make man in his and their likeness. This seems to lay a foundation for polytheism, and I am startled at it, because it is inconsistent with that unity of the Godhead which my reason shows me, and which the general tenor even of the Mosaic law and history asserts. The divine,

on the contrary, triumphs in the passage; because he drags it, against reason and this revelation both, to signify the three coequal Persons in one Godhead, which no reason can comprehend, which no revelation affirms explicitly, and which has no foundation, except that of a theology much more modern than this.

The more I compare what Moses says of this God, and by a supposed inspiration from him, the more repugnant I find the whole to be demonstrated, and even to obvious truth. Nothing can better resemble modern rabbinical traditions, than these ancient and Mosaical traditions: the same ignorance of nature, physical and moral, the same irreverent conceptions of the Supreme Being prevails in both. Moses, they say, was divinely inspired, and yet Moses was as ignorant of the true system of the universe, as any of the people of his age. I need not descend into particulars to show this ignorance. To evade the objection drawn from it, we are told that he conformed himself to that of the people. He did not write to instruct the Israelites in natural philosophy, but to imprint strongly on their minds a belief of one God, the Creator of all things. Was it necessary to that purpose that he should explain to them the Copernican system? No, most certainly. But it was not necessary to this purpose, neither, that he should give them an absurd account, since he thought fit to give them one, of the creation of our physical, and we may say, of our moral system. It was not necessary he should tell them, for instance, that light was created, and the distinction of night and day, of evening and morning, were made before the sun, the moon, and the stars, which were "set in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night, and to be for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years." It was not necessary that he should tell them, how this moral system was destroyed, by the wiles of a serpent, and by the eating of an apple, almost as soon as it began, against the intention, as well as command, of the Creator. Besides, Moses must be considered as appointed, and inspired by God, to write, not only for his own age, but for all future ages; for the most enlightened as well as for the most ignorant: in which case, that his history might answer all the designs of Eternal Wisdom, it should have been proportioned to the ignorance of the Israelites, as little able to understand one system of philosophy as another, without giving so much reason to people, better informed, to believe him as ignorant as any uninspired person could be.

If the ignorance and the errors, which betray themselves very grossly in the writings ascribed to Moses, make it impossible to believe such an author divinely inspired, the confused, inconsistent, and unworthy notions of a Supreme Being, which appear in his writings, show very evidently, that the true God was un-

known to him. He acknowledged but one God, and the people were forbid to worship any other. But then he puts this one God to as many and as unworthy uses, in the service of man, as the heathens put their many gods, of different orders, and he was, therefore, in this respect, more inconsistent than they were. The God of Moses creates the world, makes man, and repents of it immediately, for a reason which he might have prevented by a little less indulgence to, what is called, free will. As soon as this indulgence had given an opportunity to the serpent to tempt Eve, and to Eve to tempt Adam, who should have known the nature of serpents better, since he had just given to all animals the names that were proper to them; in short, as soon as they had eat the forbidden apple, and were fallen, they heard the voice of God, who was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. He condemned them for their disobedience; he cursed the earth, for their sakes, and the serpent above all other beasts. Their eyes were then opened, they knew that they were naked, and they made themselves aprons of fig-leaves, which served to cover their nudity, till God made them coats of skins, for that purpose, and then drove them out of paradise. Thus death and sin entered into the world, and the crime of this unhappy pair was punished in their whole posterity. This strange story, so trifling and so serious, and wherein God is made a principal actor with the serpent and Adam and Eve, has given occasion to much silly pains that have been taken, both by Jews and Christians, to lessen the absurdity of it, if that were possible. Since it is impossible, some have attempted to explain the whole allegorically, and it may not seem improbable that this allegory had been invented, among other Egyptian mysteries, to signify the introduction of physical and moral evil into the world, by the fault of man, and against the design of God. This however cannot be admitted by Christians; for if it was, what would become of that famous text whereon the doctrine of our redemption is founded? The whole therefore must be understood literally, and in that case the God who made the world and man, that is, the Supreme Being, is the same God who walks in the garden, to enjoy the cool of the evening, who tries this famous cause, and insults our first parents by irony and sarcasm.

Thus again, and to show in another instance what inconsistency, as well as absurdity, Moses imputed to his one God, let us observe, that he makes this God repent a second time that he had made man on the earth, because "he also was flesh, every imagination of his heart was evil, and all flesh had corrupted his way." For this reason he resolved to drown the whole world, and every living creature in it, except one man, called Noah, his family, and as many birds, and beasts, and

creeping things as were necessary to replenish the earth. This resolution taken, the God of Moses orders Noah to build an ark, or clumsy chest, in the fashion and in the proportions he prescribes very minutely. This done, he crowds all the living creatures, he intended to save, men, and birds, and beasts, and insects, into the ark; though great scholars pretend to show, by a fair calculation, that far from being crowded, there was ample room for them all in it. As soon as they were in, God shut the door upon them, the deluge began, and had its full effect. When it was over, and as soon as God smelled the sweet savor of a burnt offering, on the altar Noah had erected, he repented again, and resolved not to curse the ground any more for man's sake, nor for a reason, which should have hindered him from doing it at all, though he had done it twice already. He established a covenant with Noah, with his sons, and with their posterity, and that he might remember this covenant, between him and the earth, or every living creature upon the earth, which he had promised to drown no more, he declares to them the institution of a rainbow, designed to put him in mind of his promise, whenever he should bring a cloud over the earth.

Abraham descended from Noah by Shem, and God made a new covenant with him and his posterity. The Supreme Being condescended to be the tutelary God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and under this character he acted a part which a sensible heathen, not transported by presumptuous notions of his own importance, nor by the impudence of enthusiasm, would have thought too mean and too low for any of his inferior gods or demons. The whole history, from Noah to Abraham, and from Abraham to the Exode, is a series of tales that would appear fit to amuse children alone, if they were found in any other book, though they served two great purposes of pride and ambition among an ignorant and barbarous people. They served to give Jacob the preference, over a much better man, over his brother Esau. He acquired indeed this birth-right, and the prior blessing of a doating father, by a most infamous fraud; but the fraud was sufficient, even in the eye of God, to give the descendants of the younger brother, the Israelites, an entire preference over the descendants of the elder brother, the Edomites, and to set the former in the place of his favorite people. The same tales served the ambition, as well as the pride of the former, who claimed on their authority, as the legitimate offspring of Abraham, a right to the land of Canaan, which God had given to Abraham, and to all the glorious promises, which he had made to that patriarch. The other nations of the earth were plunged in idolatry; God left them in it; he neglected them, and thought it enough to preserve the knowledge of himself, and the purity

of his worship, in Palestine: for which purpose he gave a particular law, as well as the country of the Canaanites, to the Israelites. If we consider his laws, as means of preserving monotheism, and the purity of worship, in opposition to polytheism and superstition, we shall find that no means could be worse proportioned to this end. If we consider the manner in which this people was conducted, by God himself, out of Egypt into the promised land; how they acquired the possession of it, by his immediate assistance, and by the execution of his orders, signified to their leaders; we shall find, that nothing can be conceived more unworthy of an all-perfect Being. In order to preserve the purity of his worship, he prescribes to them a multitude of rites and ceremonies, founded in the superstitions of Egypt, from which they were to be weaned, or in some analogy to them. He succeeded accordingly. They were never weaned entirely from all these superstitions, and the great merit of the law of Moses was teaching the people to adore one God, as much as the idolatrous nations adored several. This may be called sanctifying pagan rites and ceremonies, in theological language; but it is profaning the pure worship of God, in the language of common sense.—In order to make good his grant to Abraham of the land of Canaan, he orders the posterity of this patriarch to conquer it, and to exterminate the inhabitants. Just so the leaders of Huns, of Goths, and Vandals, might, and did make good their promises with the people who followed them. Just so the Spaniards made good the decree of Alexander the Sixth, when they conquered America. Pizarro was not more cruel than Joshua, nor the Franciscan monk, who accompanied him in his expedition against Atahualpa, so cruel as Samuel, who spoke in the name of the Lord. The Franciscan monk excited the soldiers to kill the king of Peru in the heat of battle. The Jewish priest hewed the king of the Amalekites "to pieces before the Lord," in cool blood, and Saul was deposed for the clemency he had showed, though he too had exercised cruelty enough to sate any human ferocity.

I am not ignorant of the arbitrary assumptions, and silly evasions, which are employed to soften and excuse such acts of cruelty, by ancient fathers, and modern commentators. You may remember, that we read together, not long ago, the answer which Cyril of Alexandria wrote to the emperor Julian, after the death of this emperor. When we laid aside the Billingsgate, and the long recriminations, by which if he could not defend Moses, he tried to revenge himself on Plato, we found little, or nothing, in it that deserved attention, except for its absurdity; for absurdity deserves some attention to warn us against it. The men who justify such cruelties, as I have mentioned, and many others,

which might be cited from the Old Testament, upon any hypothesis whatever, must have very ill hearts as well as heads; and he, who imputes them to the Supreme Being, is worse than an atheist, though he pass for a saint.

It is very unnecessary, in writing to you, that I should dwell upon the stale, theological artifices that are employed to get over such objections as have been raised against the books of Moses, and the other books of the Old Testament. The most absurd things they contain, are called, sometimes, types and figures, though they have no more relation to the things said to be typified and signified by them, than to any thing that passes now in France. Others of the same kind are called allegories, and are explained, not by the book wherein they are found, but by some fanciful commentary on them. Sometimes the order of allegory is inverted, and things, plain in themselves, are assumed to be allegories, in order to establish, upon them, such doctrines as suit theological hypotheses; many examples of which may be found in the writings of St. Paul. But the great expedient they employ after him likewise, is that of mystery; when things, that stand in flat contradiction to the divine attributes, and that can be neither disguised by allegory, nor softened by analogy, are urged against them. When a theist sees nothing repugnant to the wisdom and power, or any other attributes of a supreme, all-perfect being, in the works of God, and therefore thinks himself justified in rejecting the impiety of those who would impose on him, as the word of God, a book which contains scarce any thing that is not so, the divine has recourse to exclamation. Restrain your profane temerity, he cries. The wisdom of God is not like the wisdom of man, nor the justice of God like the justice of man; and who art thou, O man! who presumest to sound the depths of either? There is something so impudent, as well as absurd in this proceeding, that common as it is, one can see no example of it without surprise; for what can any man mean, who insists that I should receive these books, as the word of God, on account of the evident marks of a divine original, which he pretends to show me in them; and then stops me in this examination, by assuming the very thing that is in question? There are many appearances, no doubt, in the physical and moral systems which may pass for mysteries, because we cannot fully comprehend them; but there is nothing in either of these, repugnant to any excellency which we ought to attribute to the Supreme Being. We confess our ignorance, but we do not therefore call in question the divine attributes, nor disbelieve these systems to be his work, nor the law of nature to be his law. Had we the same certainty that the Jewish Scriptures were his word, we might reason in the same manner about them. But we cannot believe

them to be his word, though we know that the physical and moral systems are his work, whilst we find in them such repugnances to the nature of an all-perfect being; not mysteries, but absurdities; not things incomprehensible, but things that imply, manifestly, contradiction with his nature. They imply it so strongly, that if we believe in Moses and his God, we cannot believe in that God, whom our reason shows us; nay, we must believe against knowledge, and oppose the authority of Jewish traditions to demonstration.

Here will I conclude, having said enough, I think, to show that the beginning of the world is sufficiently proved, by the universality of tradition; that the testimony of Moses cannot be reputed an historical testimony, if we give no more credit to him than we should give to any other historian; and that we cannot admit his testimony, for divine, without absurdity and blasphemy.

LETTERS OR ESSAYS

ADDRESSED TO

ALEXANDER POPE, ESQ.

INTRODUCTION.

Dear Sir:—Since you have begun, at my request, the work which I have wished long that you would undertake, it is but reasonable that I submit to the task you impose upon me. Mere compliance with any thing you desire, is a pleasure to me. On the present occasion, however, this compliance is a little interested; and that I may not assume more merit with you than I really have, I will own that in performing this act of friendship, for such you are willing to esteem it, the purity of my motive is corrupted by some regard to my private utility. In short, I suspect you to be guilty of a very friendly fraud, and to mean my service, whilst you seem to mean your own.

In leading me to discourse, as you have done often, and in pressing me to write as you do now, on certain subjects, you may propose to draw me back to those trains of thought, which are, above all others, worthy to employ the human mind, and I thank you for it. They have been often interrupted by the business and dissipations of the world, but they were never so more grievously to me, nor less usefully to the public, than since royal seduction prevailed on me to abandon the quiet and leisure of the retreat I had chosen abroad, and to neglect the example of Rutilius, for I might have imitated him in this at least, who fled further from his country when he was invited home.

You have begun your ethic epistles in a masterly manner. You have copied no other writer, nor will you, I think, be copied by any one. It is with genius as it is with beauty; there are a thousand pretty things that charm alike; but superior genius, like

superior beauty, has always something particular, something that belongs to itself alone. It is always distinguishable, not only from those who have no claim to excellence, but even from those who excel, when any such there are.

I am pleased, you may be sure, to find your satire turn in the very beginning of these epistles, against the principal cause, for such you know that I think it, of all the errors, all the contradictions, and all the disputes which have arisen among those who impose themselves on their fellow-creatures for great masters, and almost sole proprietors of a gift of God, which is common to the whole species. This gift is reason, a faculty, or rather an aggregate of faculties, that is bestowed, in different degrees, and not in the highest certainly, on those who make the highest pretensions to it. Let your satire chastise, and if it be possible, humble that pride, which is the fruitful parent of their vain curiosity, and bold presumption; which renders them dogmatical in the midst of ignorance, and often sceptical in the midst of knowledge. The man who is puffed up with this philosophical pride, whether divine, or theist, or atheist, deserves no more to be respected, than one of those trifling creatures, who are conscious of little else than their animality, and who stop as far short of the attainable perfections of their nature, as the other attempts to go beyond them. You will discover as many silly affections, as much foppery and futility, as much inconsistency and low artifice, in one as in the other. I never met the mad-woman at Brentford, decked out in new and old rags, and nice and fantastical in the manner of wearing them, without reflecting on many of the profound scholars, and sublime philosophers of our own, and of former ages.

You may expect some contradiction, and some obloquy on the part of these men, though you will have less to apprehend from their malice and resentment, than a writer in prose on the same subjects would have. You will be safer in the generalities of poetry, and I know your precaution enough to know, that you will screen yourself in them against any direct charge of heterodoxy. But the great clamor of all will be raised when you descend lower, and let your muse loose among the herd of mankind. Then will those powers of dulness, whom you have ridiculed into immortality, be called forth in one united phalanx against you. But why do I talk of what may happen? You have experienced lately something more than I prognosticate. Fools and knaves should be modest at least, they should ask quarter of men of sense and virtue; and so they do till they grow up to a majority; till a similitude of character assures them of the protection of the great. But then vice and folly, such as prevail in our country, corrupt our manners, deform even social life, and

contribute to make us ridiculous as well as miserable, will claim respect for the sake of the vicious and the foolish. It will be then no longer sufficient to spare persons; for to draw even characters of imagination must become criminal, when the application of them to those of highest rank, and greatest power cannot fail to be made. You began to laugh at the ridiculous taste, or the no taste in gardening and building, of some men who are at great expense in both. What a clamor was raised instantly? The name of Timon was applied to a noble person with double malice, to make him ridiculous, and you who lived in friendship with him, odious. By the authority that employed itself to encourage this clamor, and by the industry used to spread and support it, one would have thought that you had directed your satire in that epistle to political subjects, and had inveighed against those who impoverish, dishonor, and sell their country, instead of making yourself inoffensively merry at the expense of men who ruin none but themselves, and render none but themselves ridiculous. What will the clamor be, and how will the same authority foment it, when you proceed to lash, in other instances, our want of elegance even in luxury, and our wild profusion, the source of insatiable rapacity, and almost universal venality? My mind forebodes that the time will come, and who knows how near it may be, when other powers than those of Grub street, may be drawn forth against you, and when vice and folly may be avowedly sheltered behind a power instituted for better, and contrary purposes; for punishment of one, and for the reformation of both.

But however this may be, pursue your task undauntedly, and whilst so many others convert the noblest employments of human society into sordid trades, let the generous muse resume her ancient dignity, re-assert her ancient prerogative, and instruct and reform as well as amuse the world. Let her give a new turn to the thoughts of men, raise new affections in their minds, and determine in another and better manner the passions of their hearts. Poets, they say, were the first philosophers and divines, in every country; and in ours, perhaps, the first institutions of religion, and civil policy, were owing to our bards. Their task might be hard, their merit was certainly great. But if they were to rise now from the dead, they would find the second task, if I mistake not, much harder than the first, and confess it more easy to deal with ignorance than with error. When societies are once established, and governments formed, men flatter themselves that they proceed in cultivating the first rudiments of civility, policy, religion, and learning. But they do not observe that the private interests of many, the prejudices, affections, and passions of all, have a large share in the work, and often the largest. These

put a sort of bias on the mind, which makes it decline from the straight course; and the further these supposed improvements are carried, the greater this declination grows, till men lose sight of primitive and real nature, and have no other guide but custom, a second and a false nature. The author of one is Divine Wisdom, of the other, human imagination; and yet whenever the second stands in opposition to the first, as it does most frequently, the second prevails. From hence it happens, that the most civilised nations are often guilty of injustice and cruelty, which the least civilised would abhor, and that many of the most absurd opinions and doctrines, which have been imposed in the dark ages of ignorance, continue to be the opinions, and doctrines of ages enlightened by philosophy and learning. If I was a philosopher, says Montaigne, I would naturalise art, instead of artilising nature. The expression is odd, but the sense is good, and what he recommends would be done, if the reasons that have been given did not stand in the way; if the self-interest of some men, the madness of others, and the universal pride of the human heart, did not determine them to prefer error to truth, and authority to reason.

Whilst your muse is employed to lash the vicious into repentance, or to laugh the fools of the age into shame, and whilst she rises sometimes to the noblest subjects of philosophical meditation, I shall throw upon paper, for your satisfaction, and for my own, some part at least of what I have thought and said formerly on the last of these subjects, as well as the reflections that they may suggest to me further in writing on them. The strange situation I am in, and the melancholy state of public affairs take up much of my time, divide or even dissipate my thoughts, and which is worse, drag the mind down by perpetual interruptions, from a philosophical tone, or temper, to the drudgery of private and public business. The last lies nearest my heart; and since I am once more engaged in the service of my country, disarmed, gagged, and almost bound as I am, I will not abandon it as long as the integrity and perseverance of those who are under none of these disadvantages, and with whom I now co-operate, make it reasonable for me to act the same part. Further than this, no shadow of duty obliges me to go. Plato ceased to act for the commonwealth, when he ceased to persuade; and Solon laid down his arms before the public magazine, when Pisistratus grew too strong to be opposed any longer with hopes of success.

Though my situation and my engagements are sufficiently known to you, I choose to mention them on this occasion, lest you should expect from me any thing more than I find myself able to perform whilst I am in them. It has been said by many, that they wanted time to make their discourses shorter, and if

this be a good excuse, as I think it may be often, I lay in my claim to it. You must neither expect, in what I am about to write to you, that brevity which might be expected in letters, or essays, nor that exactness of method, nor that fulness of the several parts which they affect to observe, who presume to write philosophical treatises. The merit of brevity is relative to the manner, and style, in which any subject is treated, as well as to the nature of it; for the same subject may be sometimes treated very differently, and yet very properly, in both these respects.— Should the poet make syllogisms in verse, or pursue a long process of reasoning in the didactic style, he would be sure to tire his reader on the whole, like Lucretius, though he reasoned better than the Roman, and put into some parts of his work the same poetical fire. He may write, as you have begun to do, on philosophical subjects, but he must write in his own character. He must contract, he may shadow, he has a right to omit whatever will not be cast in the poetic mould, and when he cannot instruct, he may hope to please. But the philosopher has no such privileges. He may contract sometimes, he must never shadow. He must be limited by his matter, lest he should grow whimsical; and by the parts of it which he understands best, lest he should grow obscure. But these parts he must develope fully, and he has no right to omit any thing that may serve the purpose of truth, whether it please, or not. As it would be disingenuous to sacrifice truth to popularity, so it is trifling to appeal to the reason and experience of mankind, as every philosophical writer does, or must be understood to do, and then to talk, like Plato, and his ancient and modern disciples, to the imagination only. There is no need however to banish eloquence out of philosophy; and truth and reason are no enemies to the purity, nor to the ornaments of language. But as the want of an exact determination of ideas, and of an exact precision in the use of words, is inexcusable in a philosopher, he must preserve them, even at the expense of style. In short, it seems to me, that the business of the philosopher is to dilate, if I may borrow this word from Tully, to press, to prove, to convince; and that of the poet to hint, to touch his subject with short and spirited strokes, to warm the affections, and to speak to the heart.

Though I seem to prepare an apology for prolixity even in writing essays, I will endeavor not to be tedious; and this endeavor may succeed the better, perhaps, by declining any over strict observation of method. There are certain points of that which I esteem the first philosophy, whereof I shall never lose sight; but this will be very consistent with a sort of epistolary license. To digress, and to ramble, are different things; and he who knows the country through which he travels, may venture

out of the high road because he is sure of finding his way back to it again. Thus the several matters that may arise, even accidentally before me, will have some share in guiding my pen.

I dare not promise that the sections or members of these essays will bear that nice proportion to one another, and to the whole, which a severe critic would require. All I dare promise you is, that my thoughts, in what order soever they flow, shall be communicated to you just as they pass through my mind, just as they use to be when we converse together on those, or any other subjects; when we saunter alone, or as we have often done with good Arbuthnot, and the jocose Dean of St. Patrick's, among the multiplied scenes of your little garden. That theatre is large enough for my ambition. I dare not pretend to instruct mankind, and I am not humble enough to write to the public for any other purpose. I mean, by writing on such subjects as I intend here, to make some trial of my progress in search of the most important truths, and to make this trial before a friend, in whom, I think, I may confide. These epistolary essays, therefore, will be written with as little regard to form, and with as little reserve, as I used to show in the conversations which have given occasion to them, when I maintained the same opinions, and insisted on the same reasons in defence of them.

It might seem strange to a man, not well acquainted with the world, and in particular with the philosophical and theological tribe, that so much precaution should be necessary in the communication of our thoughts on any subject of the first philosophy, which is of common concern to the whole race of mankind, and wherein no one can have, according to nature and truth, any separate interest. Yet so it is. The separate interests we cannot have by God's institutions, are created by those of man; and there is no subject on which men deal more unfairly with one another than this. There are separate interests, to mention them in general only, of prejudice, and of profession. By the first, men set out in the search of truth under the conduct of error, and work up their heated imaginations often to such a delirium, that the more genius, and the more learning they have, the madder they grow. By the second, they are sworn, as it were, to follow all their lives the authority of some particular school, to which "tanquam scopulo adhærescunt;"* for the condition of their engagement is to defend certain doctrines, and even mere forms of speech, without examination, or to examine only in order to defend them. By both, they become philosophers as men became Christians in the primitive church, or as they determined themselves about disputed doctrines; for, says Hilarius,

* Tully.

writing to St. Austin, "Your holiness knows, that the greatest part of the faithful embrace, or refuse to embrace a doctrine, for no reason but the impression which the name and authority of some body or other makes on them." What now can a man who seeks truth, for the sake of truth, and is indifferent where he finds it, expect from any communication of his thoughts to such men as these? He will be much deceived, if he expects any thing better than imposition, or altercation.

Few men have, I believe, consulted others, both the living and the dead, with less presumption, and in a greater spirit of docility, than I have done; and the more I have consulted, the less have I found of that inward conviction on which a mind that is not absolutely implicit, can rest. I thought, for a time, that this must be my fault. I distrusted, myself, not my teachers, men of the greatest name ancient and modern. But I found at last, that it was safer to trust myself than them, and to proceed by the light of my own understanding, than to wander after these *ignes fatui* of philosophy. If I am able, therefore, to tell you easily, and at the same time so clearly and distinctly as to be easily understood, and so strongly as not to be easily refuted, how I have thought for myself, I shall be persuaded that I have thought enough on these subjects. If I am not able to do this, it will be evident that I have not thought on them enough. I must review my opinions, discover and correct my errors.

I have said, that the subjects I mean, and which will be the principal objects of these essays, are those of the first philosophy, and it is fit, therefore, that I should explain what I understand by the first philosophy. Do not imagine that I understand what has passed commonly under that name, metaphysical pneumatics, for instance, or ontology. The first are conversant about imaginary substances, such as may, and may not exist. That there is a God we can demonstrate; and although we know nothing of his manner of being, yet we acknowledge him to be immaterial, because a thousand absurdities, and such as imply the strongest contradiction, result from the supposition that the Supreme Being is a system of matter. But of any other spirits we neither have, nor can have any knowledge, and no man will be inquisitive about spiritual physiognomy, nor go about to inquire, I believe, at this time, as Evodius inquired of St. Austin, whether our immaterial part, the soul, does not remain united, when it forsakes this gross terrestrial body, to some ethereal body, more subtile, and more fine, which was one of the Pythagorean, and Platonic whimsies; nor be under any concern to know, if this be not the case of the dead, how souls can be distinguished after their separation, that of Dives, for example, from that of Lazarus. The second, that is ontology, treats most scientifically of Being ab-

stracted from all Being "de ente quatenus ens." It came in fashion whilst Aristotle was in fashion, and has been spun into an immense web out of scholastic brains. But it should be, and I think it is already left to the acute disciples of Leibnitz who dug for gold in the ordure of the schools; and to other German wits. Let them darken by tedious definitions, what is too plain to need any; or let them employ their vocabulary of barbarous terms, to propagate an unintelligible jargon, which is supposed to express such abstractions as they cannot make, and according to which, however, they presume often to control the particular and most evident truths of experimental knowledge. Such reputed science deserves no rank in philosophy, not the last, and much less the first.

I desire you not to imagine neither, that I understand by the first philosophy, even such a science as my Lord Bacon* describes, a science of general observations, and axioms, such as do not belong properly to any particular part of science, but are common to many, "and of an higher stage," as he expresses himself. He complains, that philosophers have not gone up to the "spring-head," which would be of "general, and excellent use for the disclosing of nature, and the abridgment of art;" though they "draw now and then a bucket of water out of the well for some particular use." I respect, no man more, this great authority, but I respect no authority enough to subscribe on the faith of it, to that which appears to me fantastical, as if it were real. Now this spring-head of science is purely fantastical, and the figure conveys a false notion to the mind, as figures, employed licentiously, are apt to do. The great author himself calls these "axioms," which are to constitute his first philosophy, "observations." Such they are properly, for there are some uniform principles, or uniform impressions of the same nature to be observed in very different subjects, "una eademque naturæ vestigia aut signacula diversis materiis et subjectis impressa." These observations, therefore, when they are sufficiently verified and well-established, may be properly applied in discourse, or writing, from one subject to another. But I apprehend that when they are so applied, they serve rather to illustrate a proposition than to "disclose nature," or to "abridge art." They may have a better foundation than similitudes, and comparisons more loosely, and more superficially made. They may compare realities, not appearances; things that nature has made alike, not things that seem only to have some relation of this kind in our imaginations. But still they are comparisons of things distinct, and independent. They do not lead us to things; but things that are

* Advan. of Learn. lib. 2.

lead us to make them. He who possesses two sciences, and the same will be often true of arts, may find in certain respects a similitude between them, because he possesses both. If he did not possess both, he would be led by neither to the acquisition of the other. Such observations are effects, not means of knowledge, and therefore to suppose that any collection of them can constitute a science of an "higher stage," from whence we may reason *á priori* down to particulars, is, I presume, to suppose something very groundless, and very useless at best to the advancement of knowledge. A pretended science of this kind must be barren of knowledge, and may be fruitful of error, as the Persian magic was, if it proceeded on the faint analogy that may be discovered between physics and politics, and deduced the rules of civil government from what the professors of it observed of the operations, and works of nature in the material world. The very specimen of their magic, which my Lord Bacon has given, would be sufficient to justify what is here objected to his doctrine.

Let us conclude this head by mentioning two examples among others, which he brings to explain the better what he means by his first philosophy. The first is this axiom,* "if to unequals you add equals, all will be unequal." This, he says, is an "axiom of justice, as well as of mathematics," and he asks whether there is not a "true coincidence between commutative, and distributive justice, and arithmetical, and geometrical proportion?" But I would ask in my turn, whether the certainty that any arithmetician, or geometrician has of the arithmetical, or geometrical truth, will lead him to discover this coincidence? I ask whether the most profound lawyer, who never heard, perhaps, this axiom, would be led to it by his notions of commutative, and distributive justice? Certainly not. He who is well skilled in arithmetic, or geometry, and in jurisprudence, may observe, perhaps, this uniformity of natural principle or impression; because he is so skilled, though to say the truth it be not very obvious: but he will not have derived his knowledge of it from any spring-head of a first philosophy, from any science of a "higher stage" than arithmetic, geometry, and jurisprudence.

The second example is this axiom,† "that the destruction of things is prevented by the reduction of them to their first principles." This rule is said to hold in religion, in physics, and in politics, and Machiavel is quoted for having established it in the last of these. Now, though this axiom be generally, it is not universally true; and to say nothing of physics, it will not be

* Si inæqualibus addas æqualia, omnia erunt inæqualia.
† Interitus rei arcetur per reductionem ejus ad principia.

hard to produce, in contradiction to it, examples of religious, and civil institutions, that would have perished, if they had been kept strictly to their first principles, and that have been supported by departing more or less from them. It may seem justly matter of wonder, that the author of "The Advancement of Learning" should espouse this maxim in religion, and politics, as well as physics, so absolutely, and that he should place it as an axiom of his first philosophy relatively to the three, since he could not do it without falling into the abuse he condemns so much in his "Organum Novum;"* the abuse philosophers are guilty of when they suffer the mind to rise too fast, as it is apt to do, from particulars to remote and general axioms. That the author of the "Political Discourses" should fall into this abuse, is not at all strange. The same abuse runs through all his writings, in which, among many wise, and many wicked reflections, and precepts, he establishes frequently general maxims, or rules of conduct on a few particular examples, and sometimes on a single example. Upon the whole matter, one of these axioms communicates no knowledge but that which we must have before we can know the axiom, and the other may betray us into great error when we apply it to use and action. One is unprofitable, the other dangerous; and the philosophy, which admits them as principles of general knowledge, deserves ill to be reputed philosophy. It would have been just as useful, and much more safe, to admit into this receptacle of axioms, those self-evident and necessary truths alone, of which we have an immediate perception, since they are not confined to any special parts of science, but are common to several, or to all. Thus these profitable axioms, "what is, is; the whole is bigger than a part," and divers others, might serve to enlarge the spring-head of a first philosophy, and be of excellent use in arguing, "ex præcognitis et præconcessis."

If you ask me now, what I understand then by a first philosophy? My answer will be such as I suppose you already prepared to receive. I understand by a first philosophy, that which deserves the first place on account of the dignity, and importance of its objects, "natural theology or theism, and natural religion or ethics." If we consider the order of the sciences in their rise and progress, the first place belongs to natural philosophy, the mother of them all, or the trunk of the tree of knowledge, out of which, and in proportion to which, like so many branches, they all grow. These branches spread wide, and bear even fruits of different kinds. But the sap that made them shoot, and makes them flourish, rises from the root through the trunk,

* ———ut intellectus a particularibus ad axiomata remota, et quasi generalissima——saliat, et volet.

and their productions are varied according to the variety of strainers through which it flows. In plain terms, I speak not here of supernatural, or revealed science, and therefore, I say, that all science, if it be real, must rise from below, and from our own level. It cannot descend from above, nor from superior systems of being and knowledge. Truth of existence is truth of knowledge, and therefore reason searches after them in one of these scenes, where both are to be found together, and are within our reach; whilst imagination hopes fondly to find them in another, where both of them are to be found, but surely not by us. The notices we receive from without concerning the beings that surround us, and the inward consciousness we have of our own, are the foundations, and the true criterions too, of all the knowledge we acquire of body and of mind; and body and mind are objects alike of natural philosophy. We assume commonly that they are two distinct substances. Be it so. They are still united, and blended, as it were, together, in one human nature: and all natures, united or not, fall within the province of natural philosophy. On the hypothesis indeed that body and soul are two distinct substances, one of which subsists after the dissolution of the other, certain men, who have taken the whimsical title of metaphysicians, as if they had science beyond the bounds of nature, or of nature discoverable by others, have taken likewise to themselves the doctrine of mind, and have left that of body, under the name of physics, to a supposed inferior order of philosophers. But the right of these stands good; for all the knowledge that can be acquired about mind, or the unextended substance of the Cartesians, must be acquired, like that about body, or the extended substance, within the bounds of their province, and by the means they employ, particular experiments and observations. Nothing can be true of mind, any more than of body, that is repugnant to these; and an intellectual hypothesis, which is not supported by the intellectual phenomena, is, at least, as ridiculous as a corporeal hypothesis which is not supported by the corporeal phenomena.

If I have said thus much in this place concerning natural philosophy, it has not been without good reason. I consider theology and ethics as the first of sciences in pre-eminence of rank. But I consider the constant contemplation of nature, by which I mean the whole system of God's works, as far as it lies open to us, as the common spring of all sciences, and even of these. What has been said, agreeably to this notion, seems to me evidently true; and yet metaphysical divines and philosophers proceed in direct contradiction to it, and have thereby, if I mistake not, bewildered themselves and a great part of mankind, in such inextricable labyrinths of hypothetical reasoning, that few

men can find their way back, and none can find it forward into the road of truth. To dwell long, and on some points always, in particular knowledge, tires the patience of these impetuous philosophers. They fly to generals. To consider, attentively, even the minutest phenomena of body and mind mortifies their pride. Rather than creep up slowly, *à posteriori*, to a little general knowledge, they soar at once as far, and as high, as imagination can carry them. From thence they descend again armed with systems and arguments *à priori*, and regardless how these agree, or clash with the phenomena of nature, they impose them on mankind.

It is this manner of philosophising, this preposterous method of beginning our search after truth, out of the bounds of human knowledge, or of continuing it beyond them, that has corrupted natural theology, and natural religion in all ages. They have been corrupted to such a degree, that it is grown, and was so long since, as necessary to plead the cause of God, if I may use this expression after Seneca, against the divine, as against the atheist; to assert his existence against the latter, to defend his attributes against the former, and to justify his providence against both. To both, a sincere and humble theist might say very properly, "I make no difference between you on many occasions; because it is indifferent* whether you deny, or defame the Supreme Being;" nay, Plutarch, though little orthodox in theology, was not in the wrong, perhaps, when he declared the last to be the worst.

In treating the subjects about which I shall write to you in these letters, or essays, it will be therefore necessary to distinguish genuine and pure theism, from the unnatural, and profane mixtures of human imagination; "what we can know of God, from what we cannot know." This is the more necessary too; because, whilst true and false notions about God and religion are blended together in our minds, under one specious name of science, the false are more likely to make men doubt of the true, as it often happens, than to persuade men that they are true themselves. Now in order to this purpose, nothing can be more effectual than to go to the root of error, of that primitive error which encourages our curiosity, sustains our pride, fortifies our prejudices, and gives pretence to delusion. This primitive error consists in the high opinion we are apt to entertain of the human mind, though it holds, in truth, a very low rank in the intellectual system. To cure this error, we need only turn our eyes inward, and contemplate impartially what passes there from the infancy to the maturity of the mind. Thus it will not be diffi-

* Utrum deum neges an infames.

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cult, and thus alone it is possible, to discover the true nature of human knowledge, how far it extends, how far it is real, and where, and how it begins to be fantastical.

Such an inquiry, if it cannot check the presumption, nor humble the pride of metaphysicians, may serve to undeceive others.—Locke pursued it. He grounded all he taught on the phenomena of nature. He appealed to the experience and conscious knowledge of every one, and rendered all he advanced intelligible. Leibnitz, one of the vainest, and most chimerical men that ever got a name in philosophy, and who is often so unintelligible, that no man ought to believe he understood himself, censured Locke as a superficial philosopher. What has happened? The philosophy of one has forced its way into general approbation: that of the other has carried no conviction, and scarce any information to those who have misspent their time about it. To speak the truth, though it may seem a paradox, our knowledge on many subjects, and particularly on those which we intend here, must be superficial to be real. This is the condition of humanity. We are placed, as it were, in an intellectual twilight, where we discover but few things clearly, and none entirely, and yet see just enough to tempt us with the hope of making better and more discoveries. Thus flattered, men push their inquiries on, and may be properly enough compared to Ixion,* who "imagined he had Juno in his arms whilst he embraced a cloud."

To be contented to know things, as God has made us capable of knowing them, is then a first principle necessary to secure us from falling into error; and if there is any subject upon which we should be most on our guard against error, it is surely that which I have called here the "first philosophy." God is hid from us in the majesty of his nature, and the little we discover of him, must be discovered by the light that is reflected from his works. Out of this light, therefore, we should never go in our inquiries and reasonings about his nature, his attributes, and the order of his providence: and yet upon these subjects, men depart the furthest from it, nay, they who depart the furthest, are the best heard by the bulk of mankind. The less men know, the more they believe that they know. Belief passes in their minds for knowledge: and the very circumstances, which should beget doubt, produce increase of faith. Every glittering apparition that is pointed out to them, in the vast wild of imagination, passes for a reality: and the more distant, the more confused, the more incomprehensible it is, the more sublime it is esteemed. He who should attempt to shift these scenes of airy vision, for those of real knowledge, might expect to be treated with scorn and anger,

* Lord Bacon.

by the whole theological, and metaphysical tribe, the masters, and the scholars. He would be despised as a plebeian philosopher, and railed at as an infidel. It would be sounded high, that he debased human nature, which has a cognation, so the reverend and learned doctor Cudworth calls it, with the divine; that the soul of man, immaterial and immortal by its nature, was made to contemplate higher and nobler objects than this sensible world, and even than itself; since it was made to contemplate God, and to be united to him. In such clamor as this, the voice of truth and of reason would be drowned, and with both of them on his side, he who opposed it would make many enemies, and few converts. Nay, I am apt to think, that some of these, if he made any, would say to him, as soon as the gaudy visions of error were dispelled, and till they were accustomed to the simplicity of truth, *pol me occidistis.* Prudence forbids me, therefore, to write as I think to the world, whilst friendship forbids me to write otherwise to you. I have been a martyr of faction in politics, and have no vocation to be so in philosophy.

But there is another consideration which deserves more regard, because it is of a public nature, and because the common interests of society may be affected by it. Truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, revelations of the Creator, inventions of the creature, dictates of reason, sallies of enthusiasm, have been blended so long together in our systems of theology, that it may be thought dangerous to separate them; lest by attacking some parts of these systems we should shake the whole. It may be thought that error, itself, deserves to be respected on this account, and that men who are deluded for their good, should be deluded on.

Some such reflections as these it is probable that Erasmus made, when he observed in one of his letters to Melancthon, that Plato, dreaming of a philosophical commonwealth, saw the impossibility of governing the multitude without deceiving them. "Let not Christians lie," says this great divine, "but let it not be thought neither, that every truth ought to be thrown out to the vulgar." "Non expedit omnem veritatem prodere vulgo." Scævola and Varro were more explicit than Erasmus, and more reasonable than Plato. They held not only that many truths were to be concealed from the vulgar, but that it was expedient the vulgar should believe many things that were false. They distinguished at the same time very rightly, between the regard due to religions already established, and the conduct to be held in the establishment of them. The Greek assumed, that men could not be governed by truth, and erected on this principle a fabulous theology. The Romans were not of the same opinion. Varro declared expressly, that if he had been to frame a new in-

stitution, he would have framed it "ex naturæ potius formulâ." But they both thought that things evidently false might deserve an outward respect, when they are interwoven into a system of government. This outward respect every good citizen will show them in such a case, and they can claim no more in any. He will not propagate these errors, but he will be cautious how he propagates even truth, in opposition to them.

There has been much noise made about free thinking, and men have been animated, in the contest, by a spirit that becomes neither the character of divines, nor that of good citizens; by an arbitrary tyrannical spirit under the mask of religious zeal, and by a presumptuous, factious spirit under that of liberty. If the first could prevail, they would establish implicit belief and blind obedience, and an inquisition to maintain this abject servitude. To assert Antipodes might become once more as heretical as Arianism, or Pelagianism: and men might be dragged to the jails of some holy office, like Galilei, for saying they had seen what in fact they had seen, and what every one else that pleased might see. If the second could prevail, they would destroy at once the general influence of religion, by shaking the foundations of it which education had laid. These are wide extremes. Is there no middle path in which a reasonable man and a good citizen may direct his steps? I think there is.

Every one has an undoubted right to think freely; nay, it is the duty of every one to do so, as far as he has the necessary means, and opportunities. This duty too is in no case so incumbent on him, as in those that regard what I call, the first philosophy. They who have neither means nor opportunities of this sort, must submit their opinions to authority; and to what authority can they resign themselves so properly, and so safely, as to that of the laws and constitution of their country? In general, nothing can be more absurd than to take opinions, of the greatest moment, and such as concern us the most intimately, on trust. But there is no help against it in many particular cases. Things the most absurd in speculation become necessary in practice. Such is the human constitution, and reason excuses them on the account of this necessity. Reason does even a little more; and it is all she can do. She gives the best direction possible to the absurdity. Thus she directs those who must believe because they cannot know, to believe in the laws of their country, and conform their opinions and practice to those of their ancestors, to those of Coruncanius, of Scipio, of Scævola, not to those of Zeno, of Cleanthes, of Chrysippus.*

But now the same reason that gives this direction to such men

* De Nat Deor.

as these will give a very contrary direction to those who have the means and opportunities the others want. Far from advising them to submit to this mental bondage, she will advise them to employ their whole industry, to exert the utmost freedom of thought, and to rest on no authority but hers, that is their own. She will speak to them in the language of the Soufys, a sect of philosophers in Persia, that travellers have mentioned. "Doubt," say these wise and honest free-thinkers, "is the key of knowledge. He who never doubts, never examines. He who never examines, discovers nothing. He who discovers nothing, is blind, and will remain so. If you find no reason to doubt concerning the opinions of your fathers, keep to them, they will be sufficient for you. If you find any reason to doubt concerning them, seek the truth quietly, but take care not to disturb the minds of other men."

Let us proceed agreeably to these maxims. Let us seek truth, but seek it quietly as well as freely. Let us not imagine, like some who are called free-thinkers, that every man, who can think and judge for himself, as he has a right to do, has therefore a right of speaking, any more than of acting, according to the full freedom of his thoughts. The freedom belongs to him as a rational creature. He lies under the restraint as a member of society.

If the religion we profess contained nothing more than articles of faith, and points of doctrine clearly revealed to us in the gospel, we might be obliged to renounce our natural freedom of thought in favor of this supernatural authority. But since it is notorious that a certain order of men, who call themselves the church, have been employed to make and propagate a theological system of their own, which they call Christianity, from the days of the apostles, and even from these days inclusively; it is our duty to examine and analyse the whole that we may distinguish what is divine from what is human; adhere to the first implicitly, and ascribe to the last no more authority than the word of man deserves.

Such an examination is the more necessary to be undertaken by every one who is concerned for the truth of his religion, and for the honor of Christianity, because the first preachers of it were not, and they who preach it still are not, agreed about many of the most important points of their system; because the controversies raised by these men have banished union, peace, and charity out of the Christian world; and because some parts of the system savor so much of superstition and enthusiasm, that all the prejudices of education, and the whole weight of civil and ecclesiastical power can hardly keep them in credit. These considerations deserve the more attention, because nothing can be

more true than what Plutarch said of old, and my Lord Bacon has said since: one, that "superstition," and the other, that "vain controversies" are principal causes of atheism.

I neither expect nor desire to see any public revision made of the present system of Christianity. I should fear an attempt to alter the established religion as much as they who have the most bigot attachment to it, and for reasons as good as theirs, though not entirely the same. I speak only of the duty of every private man to examine for himself, which would have an immediate good effect relatively to himself, and might have in time a good effect relatively to the public, since it would dispose the minds of men to a greater indifference about theological disputes, which are the disgrace of Christianity, and have been the plagues of the world.

Will you tell me that private judgment must submit to the established authority of "fathers" and "councils?" My answer shall be, that the fathers ancient and modern, in councils, and out of them, have raised that immense system of "artificial theology," by which genuine Christianity is perverted, and in which it is lost. These "fathers" are "fathers" of the worst sort, such as contrive to keep their children in a perpetual state of infancy, that they may exercise perpetual, and absolute dominion over them. "Quo magis regnum in illos exerceant pro suâ libidine."* I call their theology "artificial," because it is in a multitude of instances conformable neither to the religion of nature, nor to gospel Christianity, but often repugnant to both, though said to be founded on them. I shall have occasion to mention several such instances in the course of these little essays. Here I will only observe, that if it be hard to conceive how any thing so absurd as the pagan theology stands represented by the fathers who wrote against it, and as it really was, could ever gain credit among rational creatures, it is full as hard to conceive how the "artificial" theology we speak of could ever prevail, not only in ages of ignorance, but in the most enlightened. There is a letter of St. Austin, wherein he says, that he was ashamed of himself when he refuted the opinions of the former, and that he was ashamed of mankind when he considered that such absurdities were received, and defended.† The reflections might be retorted on the saint, since he broached, and defended doctrines as unworthy of the Supreme all-perfect Being, as those which the heathens taught concerning their fictitious, and inferior gods. Is it necessary to quote any other than that, by which we are

* Erasmus.

† —— jam pudet me ista refellere cum eos non puduerit ista sentire. Cum verò ausi sint etiam defendere, &c.

taught that God has created numbers of men for no purpose but to damn them? "Quisquis prædestinationis doctrinam invidiâ gravat," says Calvin, "apertè maledicit deo."* Let us say, "Quisquis prædestinationis doctrinam asserit, blasphemat." Let us not impute such cruel injustice to the All-perfect Being. Let Paul, and Austin, and Calvin, and all those who teach it be answerable for it alone. You may bring "fathers" and "councils" as evidences in the cause of artificial theology: but "reason" must be the judge, and all I contend for is, that she should be so in the breast of every Christian that can appeal to her tribunal.

Will you tell me that even such a private examination of the Christian system as I propose that every man, who is able to make it, should make for himself, is unlawful, and that if any doubts arise in our minds concerning religion, we must have recourse for the solution of them to some of that "holy order" which was instituted by God himself, and which has been continued by the imposition of hands in every Christian society from the "apostles" down to the present "clergy?" My answer shall be shortly this, it is repugnant to all the ideas of wisdom and goodness to believe that the universal terms of salvation are knowable by the means of one order of men alone, and that they continue to be so even after they have been published to all nations. Some of your directors will tell you, that whilst Christ was on earth, the apostles were the church, that he was the bishop of it, that afterwards the admission of men into this order was approved, and confirmed by visions and other divine manifestations, and that these wonderful proofs of God's interposition at the ordinations, and consecrations of presbyters, and bishops lasted even in the time of St. Cyprian, that is, in the middle of the third century. It is pity that they lasted no longer for the honor of the church, and for the conviction of those who do not sufficiently reverence the religious society. It were to be wished perhaps, that some of the secrets of electricity were improved enough to be piously, and usefully applied to this purpose. If we beheld a Shecinah, or divine presence, like the flame of a taper, on the heads of those who receive the imposition of hands, we might believe that they receive the "Holy Ghost" at the same time. But as we have no reason to believe what superstitious, credulous, or lying men, such as Cyprian himself was, reported formerly, that they might establish the proud pretensions of the clergy; so we have no reason to believe that five men of this order have any more of the divine spirit in our time, after they are ordained, than they had before. It would

* Cal. Ins. lib. 3, c. 21.

be a farce to provoke laughter, if there was no suspicion of profanation in it, to seem them gravely laying hands on one another, and bid one another receive the Holy Ghost.

Will you tell me finally, in opposition to what has been said, and that you may anticipate what remains to be said, that laymen are not only unauthorised, but quite unequal without the assistance of divines to the task I propose? If you do, I shall make no scruple to tell you, in return, that laymen may be, if they please, in every respect as fit, and are in one important respect more fit than divines to go through this examination, and to judge for themselves upon it. We say that the Scriptures, concerning the divine authenticity of which all the professors of Christianity agree, are the sole criterion of Christianity. You add tradition, concerning which there may be, and there is much dispute. We have then a certain invariable rule, whenever the Scriptures speak plainly. Whenever they do not speak so, we have this comfortable assurance, that doctrines, which nobody understands, are revealed to nobody, and are therefore improper objects of human inquiry. We know too, that if we receive the explanations and commentaries of these dark sayings from the clergy, we take the greatest part of our religion from the word of man, not from the word of God. Tradition indeed, however derived, is not to be totally rejected; for if it was, how came the canon of the Scriptures, even of the Gospels, to be fixed? How was it conveyed down to us? Traditions of general facts, and general propositions plain and uniform may be of some authority and use. But particular, anecdotical traditions, whose original authority is unknown, or justly suspicious, and that have acquired only an appearance of generality, and notoriety, because they have been frequently, and boldly repeated from age to age, deserve no more regard, than doctrines evidently added to the Scriptures under pretence of explaining, and commenting them, by men as fallible as ourselves. We may receive the Scriptures, and be persuaded of their authenticity on the faith of ecclesiastical tradition; but it seems to me, that we may reject, at the same time, all the artificial theology which has been raised on these Scriptures by doctors of the church, with as much right as they receive the Old Testament on the authority of Jewish scribes, and doctors, whilst they reject the oral law, and all rabbinical literature.

He who examines on such principles as these, which are conformable to truth and reason, may lay aside at once the immense volumes of fathers, and councils, of schoolmen, casuists, and controversial writers, which have perplexed the world so long. Natural religion will be to such a man no longer intricate; revealed religion will be no longer mysterious, nor the word of

God equivocal. Clearness and precision are two great excellences of human laws. How much more should we expect to find them in the law of God? They have been banished from thence by artificial theology; and he who is desirous to find them must banish the professors of it from his councils, instead of consulting them. He must seek for genuine Christianity with that simplicity of spirit, with which it is taught in the gospel by Christ himself. He must do the very reverse of what has been done by the persons you advise him to consult.

You see that I have said what has been said on a supposition, that, however obscure theology may be, the Christian religion is extremely plain, and requires no great learning, nor deep meditation to develop it. But if it was not so plain, if both these were necessary to develop it, is great learning the monopoly of the clergy since the resurrection of letters, as little learning was before that era? Is deep meditation, and justness of reasoning confined to men of that order by a peculiar and exclusive privilege? In short, and to ask a question which experience will decide, have these men, who boast that they are appointed by God to be the interpreters of his secret will, to represent his person, and answer in his name, as it were, out of the sanctuary,* have these men, I say, been able in more than seventeen centuries, to establish a uniform system of revealed religion, for natural religion never wanted their help, among the civil societies of Christians, or even in their own?† They do not seem to have aimed at this desirable end. Divided as they have always been, they have always studied in order to believe,‡ and to take upon trust, or to find matter of discourse, or to contradict and confute, but never to consider impartially, nor to use a free judgment. On the contrary, they who have attempted to use this freedom of judgment have been constantly, and cruelly persecuted by them.

The first steps towards the establishment of artificial theology, which has passed for Christianity ever since, were enthusiastical. They were not heretics alone, who delighted in wild allegories, and the pompous jargon of mystery. They were the orthodox fathers of the first ages, they were the disciples of the apostles, or the scholars of their disciples; for the truth of which I may appeal to the epistles, and other writings of these men that are extant, to those of Clemens, of Ignatius, or of Irenæus, for instance, and to the visions of Hermes that have so near a resemblance to the productions of Bunyan.

* N. B.—I choose to borrow these expressions from Calvin, in order to show how much they ascribe who are supposed to ascribe the least to this order.

† Cal. Ins. l. 4, c. 3.

‡ Bacon's Essays.

The next steps of the same kind were rhetorical. They were made by men who declaimed much, and reasoned ill, but who imposed on the imaginations of others by the heat of their own, by their hyperboles, their exaggerations, the acrimony of their style, and their violent invectives. Such were the Chrysostoms, the Jeromes, a Hilarius, a Cyril, and most of the fathers.

The last of the steps I shall mention were logical, and these were made very opportunely, and very advantageously for the church, and for artificial theology. Absurdity in speculation and superstition in practice had been cultivated so long, and were become so gross, that men began to see through the veils that had been thrown over them, as ignorant as those ages were. Then the schoolmen arose. I need not display their character, it is enough known. This only I will say, that having very few materials of knowledge, and much subtilty of wit, they wrought up systems of fancy on the little they knew, and invented an art, by the help of Aristotle, not of enlarging, but of puzzling knowledge with technical terms, with definitions, distinctions, and syllogisms merely verbal: they taught what they could not explain, evaded what they could not answer, and he who had the most skill in this art, might put to silence, when it came into general use, the man who was consciously certain that he had truth, and reason on his side.

The authority of the schools lasted till the resurrection of letters. But as soon as real knowledge was enlarged, and the conduct of the understanding better understood, it fell into contempt. The advocates of artificial theology have had, since that time, a very hard task. They have been obliged to defend in the light what was imposed in the dark, and to acquire knowledge to justify ignorance. They were drawn to it with reluctancy. But learning, that grew up among the laity, and controversies with one another, made this unavoidable, which was not eligible, on the principles of ecclesiastical policy. They have done with these new arms, all that great parts, great pains, and great zeal could do under such disadvantages, and we may apply to this order, on this occasion, *si pergama dextrâ*, &c. But their Troy cannot be defended, irreparable breaches have been made in it. They have improved in learning and knowledge; but this improvement has been general, and as remarkable, at least among the laity as among the clergy. Besides which, it must be owned that the former have had in this respect a sort of indirect obligation to the latter, for whilst these men have searched into antiquity, have improved criticism, and almost exhausted subtilty, they have furnished so many arms the more to such of the others as do not submit implicitly to them, but examine and judge for themselves. By refuting one another

when they differ, they have made it no hard matter to refute them all when they agree: and, I believe, there are few books written to propagate, or defend the received notions of artificial theology, which may not be refuted by the books themselves. I conclude on the whole, that laymen have, or need to have, no want of the clergy in examining, and analysing the religion they profess.

But, I said, that they are in one important respect more fit to go through this examination without the help of divines than with it. A layman, who seeks the truth, may fall into error; but as he can have no interest to deceive himself, so he has none of profession to bias his private judgment, any more than to engage him to deceive others. Now the clergyman lies strongly under this influence in every communion. How indeed should it be otherwise? Theology is become one of those sciences which Seneca calls "scientiæ in lucrum exeuntes:" and sciences, like arts, whose object is gain, are, in good English, trades. Such theology is; and men who could make no fortune, except the lowest, in any other, make often the highest in this; for the proof of which assertion I might produce some signal instances among my lords the bishops. The consequence has been uniform, for how ready soever the tradesmen of one church are to expose the false wares, that is, the errors and abuses of another, they never admit that there are any in their own: and he who admitted this, in some particular instance, would be driven out of the ecclesiastical company, as a false brother, and one who spoiled the trade.

Thus it comes to pass that new churches may be established by the dissensions, but that old ones cannot be reformed by the concurrence, of the clergy. There is no composition to be made with this order of men. He, who does not believe all they teach in every communion, is reputed nearly as criminal, as he who believes no part of it. He, who cannot assent to the Athanasian creed, of which archbishop Tillotson said, as I have heard, that he wished we were well rid, would receive no better quarter than an atheist from the generality of the clergy. What recourse now has a man who cannot be thus implicit? Some have run into scepticism, some into atheism, and, for fear of being imposed on by others, have imposed on themselves. The way to avoid these extremes, is that which has been chalked out in this introduction. We may think freely, without thinking as licentiously as divines do, when they raise a system of imagination on true foundations; or as sceptics do when they renounce all knowledge; or as atheists do when they attempt to demolish the foundations of all religion, and reject demonstration. As we think for ourselves, we may keep our thoughts to ourselves, or communicate

them with a due reserve, and in such a manner only, as it may be done without offending the laws of our country, and disturbing the public peace.

I cannot conclude my discourse on this occasion better than by putting you in mind of a passage you quoted to me once, with great applause, from a sermon of Foster, and to this effect: "Where mystery begins, religion ends." The apothegm pleased me much, and I was glad to hear such a truth from any pulpit, since it shows an inclination, at least, to purify Christianity from the leaven of artificial theology, which consists principally in making things that are very plain mysterious, and in pretending to make things that are impenetrably mysterious very plain. If you continue still of the same mind, I shall have no excuse to make to you for what I have written, and shall write. Our opinions coincide. If you have changed your mind, think again, and examine further. You will find that it is the modest, not the presumptuous inquirer who makes a real, and safe progress in the discovery of divine truths. One follows nature, and nature's God, that is, he follows God in his works, and in his word; nor presumes to go further by metaphysical and theological commentaries of his own invention, than the two texts, if I may use this expression, carry him very evidently. They who have done otherwise, and have affected to discover, by a supposed science derived from tradition, or taught in the schools, more than they who have not such science can discover concerning the nature, physical and moral, of the Supreme Being, and concerning the secrets of his providence, have been either enthusiasts, or knaves, or else of that numerous tribe who reason well very often, but reason always on some arbitrary supposition.

Much of this character belonged to the heathen divines, and it is, in all its parts peculiarly that of the ancient fathers, and modern doctors of the Christian church. The former had reason, but no revelation to guide them; and though reason be always one, we cannot wonder that different prejudices, and different tempers of imagination warped it in them, on such subjects as these, and produced all the extravagances of their theology. The latter had not the excuse of human frailty to make in mitigation of their presumption. On the contrary, the consideration of this frailty, inseparable from their nature, aggravated their presumption. They had a much surer criterion than human reason, they had divine reason, and the word of God to guide them, and to limit their inquiries. How came they to go beyond this criterion? Many of the first preachers were led into it because they preached or wrote before there was any such criterion established, in the acceptance of which they all agreed; because they preached or wrote in the mean time, on the faith of tradition,

and on a confidence that they were persons extraordinarily gifted. Other reasons succeeded these. Skill in languages, not the gift of tongues, some knowledge of the Jewish cabala, and some of heathen philosophy, of Plato's especially, made them presume to comment, and under that pretence to enlarge the system of Christianity, with as much license as they could have taken, if the word of man, instead of the word of God, had been concerned; and they had commented the civil, not the divine law. They did this so copiously, that, to give one instance of it, the exposition of St. Matthew's gospel took up ninety homilies, and that of St. John's eighty-seven in the works of Chrysostom; which puts me in mind of a puritanical parson,* who, if I mistake not, for I have never looked into the folio since I was a boy and condemned sometimes to read in it, made one hundred and nineteen sermons on the hundred and nineteenth psalm.

Now all these men, both heathens and Christians, appeared gigantic forms through the false medium of imagination, and habitual prejudice; but were, in truth, as arrant dwarfs in the knowledge to which they pretended, as you and I, and all the sons of Adam. The former, however, deserved some excuse: the latter none. The former made a very ill use of their reason, no doubt, when they presumed to dogmatise about the divine nature; but they deceived nobody. What they taught, they taught on their own authority, which every other man was at liberty to receive, or reject, as he approved or disapproved the doctrine. Christians, on the other hand, made a very ill use of revelation and reason both. Instead of employing the superior principle to direct and confine the inferior, they employed it to sanctify all that wild imagination, the passions, and the interests of the ecclesiastical order suggested. This abuse of revelation was so scandalous, that whilst they were building up a system of religion, under the name of Christianity, every one who sought to signalise himself in the enterprise, and they were multitudes, dragged the Scriptures to his opinion by different interpretations, paraphrases, and comments. Arius and Nestorius both pretended that they had it on their sides: Athanasius and Cyril on theirs. They rendered the word of God so dubious, that it ceased to be a criterion, and they had recourse to another, to councils and the decrees of councils. He must be very ignorant in ecclesiastical antiquity, who does not know by what intrigues of the contending factions, for such they were and of the worst kind, these decrees were obtained: and yet an opinion prevailing that the Holy Ghost, the same divine spirit who dictated the Scriptures, presided in these assemblies and dictated their decrees, their de-

* Dr. Manton.

crees passed for infallible decisions, and sanctified, little by little, much of the superstition, the nonsense, and even the blasphemy which the fathers taught, and all the usurpations of the church. This opinion prevailed, and influenced the minds of men, so powerfully, and so long, that Erasmus, who owns, in one of his letters, that the writings of Oecolampadius, against transubstantiation, seemed sufficient to seduce even the elect, "ut seduci posse videantur etiam electi," declares in another, that nothing hindered him from embracing the doctrine of Oecolampadius, but the consent of the church to the other doctrine, "nisi obstaret consensus ecclesiæ." Thus artificial theology rose on the demolitions, not on the foundations, of Christianity; was incorporated into it, and became a principal part of it. How much it becomes a good Christian to distinguish them in his private thoughts, at least, and how unfit even the greatest, the most moderate, and the least ambitious of the ecclesiastical order are to assist us in making this distinction, I have endeavored to show you by reason, and by example.

It remains, then, that we apply ourselves to the study of the first philosophy without any other guides than the works, and the word of God. In natural religion the clergy are unnecessary, in revealed they are dangerous, guides.

ESSAY THE FIRST.

CONCERNING

THE NATURE, EXTENT, AND REALITY

OF

HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.

SECTION I.

Among the many cavils that have been devised against the demonstrated existence of a first, intelligent, self-existent Cause of all things, this has been one; that things known must be anterior to knowledge, and that we may as well assert that the images of objects we see reflected made those objects, as that knowledge or intelligence made them. Hobbes is accused of reasoning on this principle in his Leviathan, and his book De Cive, by the author of the Intellectual System of the Universe, and his argument in the place, where he mentions the notions that reason dictates to us, concerning the divine attributes, is thus stated. "Since knowledge and intelligence are nothing more in us, than a tumult of the mind, excited by the pressure of external objects on our organs, we must not imagine there is any such thing in God, these being things which depend on natural causes." Now I think, this charge a little too hastily brought, and a little too heavily laid. So will any man who reads the context. Hobbes having said that, when we ascribe will to God, we must not conceive it to be in him, what it is in us, but must suppose it to be something analogous which we cannot conceive. He adds, "in like manner when we attribute sight, and other sensations, or knowledge, and intelligence to God, which are in us no-

thing more than a certain tumult of the mind, excited by the pressure of external objects on our organs, we must not imagine that any thing like this happens to God." I am far from subscribing to many notions which Hobbes has advanced. But still the plain and obvious meaning of this passage, according to my apprehension, is not to deny that the Supreme Being is an intelligent Being, but to distinguish between the Divine and human manner of knowing. If Hobbes did not assert a distinct kind of knowledge, and attribute "the same clearly to God Almighty" upon this occasion, the omission will not serve to fix the brand of atheism upon him. On the contrary, whatever his other opinions were, this opinion may be reconciled to the most orthodox theism. It is more reasonable, and carries along with it a more becoming reverence, than the learned writer who makes the objection shows; when, like other divines, he supposes clearly by his reflections on this passage, and indeed by the whole tenor of his writings, that intelligence and knowledge in God are the same as intelligence and knowledge in man; that the divine differs from the human in degrees, not in kind, and that by consequence if God has not the latter, he has none at all.

Absurd and impertinent vanity! We pronounce our fellow animals to be automates, or we allow them instinct, or we bestow graciously upon them, at the utmost stretch of liberality, an irrational soul, something we know not what, but something that can claim no kindred to the human mind. We scorn to admit them into the same class of intelligence with ourselves, though it be obvious, among other observations easy to be made, and tending to the same purpose, that the first inlets, and the first elements of their knowledge, and of ours, are the same. But of ourselves, we think it not too much to boast that our intelligence is a participation of the divine intelligence; that the mind of man, like that of God, contains in it the ideas of intelligible natures; that it does not rise from particular to general knowledge, but descends from universals to singulars; hovers, as it were, aloft over all the corporeal universe; is independent of the bodies that compose it, or proleptical to them, and in the order of nature before them.

Such wild notions as these, or the magic of such unmeaning sounds, and articulated air, which the warm imaginations of Asia and Africa first produced, have been echoed down to the present age, and have been propagated with so much success even in our northern and cold climates, that the heads of many reverend persons have been turned by a præternatural fermentation of the brain, or a philosophical delirium. None has been so more, I think, since the days of the latter Platonists, and the reign of the schoolmen who may be called properly the latter

peripatetics, than that of the divine I have just now quoted.— He read too much to think enough, he admired too much to think freely, and it is impossible to forbear wishing that he had taken due notice of a passage in Tully's offices, "Ne ut quidam Græca verba inculcantes jure optimo rideamur." Greek phraseology was in fashion among the Romans, as well as Greek philosophy, in Tully's days, and it is reasonable to believe that many things passed then under a Greek varnish, that would not have passed so well in mere Latin; just as we may observe, that many things have passed by the help of Greek and Latin among us, that would not have passed so well in mere English. Tully reformed this pedantry indeed, but he did it rather with a view to enrich his language, than to determine his ideas, and he lost little or no advantage by the reformation: that advantage I mean which men take, who affect to know more than they do know, from which affectation the academicians, as much as they disclaimed knowledge, were not free. He invented Latin to answer Greek words; and readers, like writers, being apt to imagine that every new word denotes something new, this expedient served well enough to help out a system, or to get rid of troublesome objections. Thus vain phraseology has been always called in to the assistance of vain philosophy, and a learned mist has been raised in order to surprise, and impose, or to escape.— These are some part of the arguties verbales, against which Montagne declaims: and, to speak in his style, they may serve to enrich a man's tongue, but they will leave his understanding as poor as they found it, and much more perplexed.

I return to the subject immediately before me, and I say that, since there must have been something from eternity, because there is something now, the eternal Being must be an intelligent Being, because there is intelligence now, (for no man will venture to assert that non-entity can produce entity, or non-intelligence intelligence,) and such a Being must exist necessarily, whether things have been always as they are, or whether they have been made in time; because it is no more possible to conceive an infinite than a finite progression of effects without a cause. Thus the existence of a God is demonstrated, and cavil against demonstration is impertinent. It is so impertinent, that he who refuses to submit to this demonstration, among others of the same kind, has but one short step more to make in order to arrive at the highest pitch of absurdity: for surely there is but one remove between a denial of the existence of God, and a denial of our own existence; because, if we have an intuitive knowledge of the latter, we have the same intuitive knowledge of all those ideas that connect the latter with the former in demonstrating *á posteriori.*

Now if the existence of such a Being can be demonstrated, the atheist and the divine are both defeated. The atheist, because the intelligence of this first Cause of all things must have preceded all existence, except his own, with which it is co-eternal. The divine, because an essential difference is established, in consequence of this demonstration, between God's manner of knowing, and that which he has been pleased to bestow on his creatures. Human knowledge is not only posterior to the human system, but the very first elements of it are ideas which we perceive impressed by outward objects on our minds: and it will avail little to urge that our minds must be still independent of outward objects, since we not only know what is, but can frame ideas of what may be, though it is not; because every man who pleases may perceive, that all the ideas he frames of what is not are framed by the combinations he makes of his ideas of what is, and in no other manner, nor by any other means whatsoever. Thus then, if we could be supposed to know that there is an ideal world in the divine intellect, according to which this sensible world was made, yet still the difference between the human and divine manner of knowing would admit of no comparison.

But it was too presumptuous in Plato to assert that the Supreme Being had need of a plan, like some human architect, to conduct the great design, when he raised the fabric of the universe: and it is still more presumptuous to assert not only that the divine intellect is furnished with ideas, like the human, and that God reasons and acts by the help of them, but that your ideas and mine are God's ideas, and that the modifications (for that is the fashionable term) of our minds are the modifications of God's mind. We talk indeed of the eternal ideas of the divine mind, and allude to our manner of knowing, that we may understand ourselves and be understood by others the better, just as we are forced very often to employ corporeal images when we speak of the operations of our own minds. But these expressions, so much abused by those who are in the delirium of metaphysical theology, have no intention to be understood in a literal sense among men who preserve their reason. If they had, they should never be employed by me, since I should think them profane as well as presumptuous.

I should think them silly too, and mere cant; for as one difference between God's manner of knowing and ours arises from what we are able to demonstrate concerning God, so there arises another from what we may know if we shut our ears to the din of hard words, and turn our attention inwards concerning man, and concerning these very ideas. Our knowledge is so dependent on our own system, that a great part of it would not be knowledge perhaps, but error, in any other. They who held, as I learn

from doctor Cudworth that some philosophers did hold, that "sensible ideas and phantasms are impressed on the soul, as on a dead thing," maintained, no doubt, a great absurdity. Aristotle's opinion was more conformable to universal experience, for he asserted, according to Sextus Empiricus, that sense was like the instrument, and intellect like the artificer; that sense was first in the order of mental operations, but that intellect was first in dignity. Now this comparison is just enough. We have internal as well as external sense, mental as well as corporeal faculties, and active as well as passive powers, if you will allow passivity as well as activity to be included in the idea of power. But then, as our senses are few, incapable of giving us much information, and capable of giving it falsely, unless we are on our guard against their deceptions; so the faculties of our minds are weak, and their progress towards knowledge not only slow, but so confined, that they are not able to carry it to the full extent of the ideas, about which they are conversant, and which they have all contributed to frame. We must conceive, as well as we can, the knowledge of the Supreme Being to be immediate, and absolute. Knowledge in us is mediate by the intervention of ideas, not only as far as sensible objects are concerned, and that goes a great way, but in the whole. It is such knowledge as we are fitted by the organization of our bodies, and the constitution of our minds to acquire. It is such as results from the relation established between them, and the system to which they belong. It is knowledge for us. It is, in one word, human, and relatively to us, when it is rightly pursued, real knowledge.

General ideas, or notions, such as the mind frames by its innate powers, such as are said to be architypes, and to refer to nothing besides themselves, may seem to be materials of axiomatical, scientifical, and, in a word, of absolute, real knowledge. But even this boasted knowledge is very precarious. These ideas or notions are not taken with exactness from the nature of things on many occasions, and the same affections, and imperfections of the mind, that corrupt the first, corrupt the subsequent operations of it. Ideas or notions are ill abstracted first, and ill compared afterwards. The more complex, the more obscure they are, and the more important, the more liable they are likewise to be abused by prejudices and habits that infect the mind, and put a wrong bias on it. But further; our progression in this knowledge, such as it is, stops always very short of our aim. We soon want ideas, or want means of comparing those we have, and it is in vain that we struggle to get forward. It is in vain that we endeavor to force that barrier, which God has opposed to our insatiable curiosity. To what purpose, indeed, should we force it, if that was in our power, since we have reason to acknowledge,

with the utmost gratitude to the Author of our nature, that every thing necessary to our well being in the state wherein he has placed us lies on the human side of this barrier; within that extent, I mean, where the operations of our minds are performed with ease and vigor, and are attended with the certainty of knowledge, or the sufficient probability of opinion? Not only unattainable, but difficult, very often, is a term synonymous to unnecessary; as we might prove, I think, by some examples drawn even from mathematical knowledge. In short, the profound meditations of philosophers, which we are so apt to admire before we have thought for ourselves, have as much regard paid to them as they deserve, when they are made the amusements of men of sense and leisure; when they are used as exercise, without any other aim than to invigorate, and strengthen the mind, and prepare it for something more conducive to our happiness, and therefore more properly our business.

> "The good, the just, the meet, the wholesome rules
> Of temperance, and aught that may improve
> The moral life."*

This short account of human ideas, and human knowledge, no part of which can be applied, without blasphemy and absurdity, to the Supreme Being, nor be denied, without folly and effrontery, of the human, is sufficient, I suppose, to constitute another difference between God's manner of knowing, and ours: a difference arising from those imperfections and limitations, of which every man is conscious.

But it is time now to ask, what then is the precise notion we are to entertain of the human mind? Shall be continue to think with some philosophers, ancient and modern, that the soul, the rational soul, for they have given us more than one, is a spiritual, and divine substance, "furnished with forms, and ideas to conceive all things by, and printed over with the seeds of universal knowledge, though the active energies of it are fatally united to some local motions in the body, and concurrently produced with them by reason of the magical union betwixt the soul and the body?" Shall we say too, that from this union all the imperfections of the human mind proceed, and that the perfection of our nature is to be quite abstracted from sensation, like the Janguis, or illuminated saints of the Indostan, whom Bernier mentions? Shall we endeavor, like these philosophers, by intenseness of thought, by fasting and other austerities, to rise up to the contemplation of the divinity, whom they assure that they see like a white, lively, ineffable light? Or shall we soften these preten-

* John Phillips.

sions a little, and embrace the system of a modern philosopher,* who affirms that God is the place of ideas, as space is of body, and that this all-perfect mind containing the ideas of all created beings, it is in God alone that we perceive every thing exterior to the soul? Shall we assume, like another philosopher,† that our ideas are the only real sensible things; that we have no reason to imagine there are any substances but active thinking substances, and that it is absurd to ascribe power to bodies, or to suppose any power but active power, any agent but spirit, or any actions of spirit without volition?

Who does not see all this to be as inconceivable as that which it pretends to explain? Have the authors of such systems, from Plato down to that fine writer Malebranche, or to that sublime genius, and good man, the bishop of Cloyne, contributed to make us better acquainted with ourselves? I think not. They have done all that human capacity can do in a wrong method; but all they have done has been to vend us poetry for philosophy, and to multiply systems of imagination. They have reasoned about the human mind, *à priori*, have assumed that they know the nature of it, and have employed much wit and eloquence to account for all the phenomena of it upon these assumptions. But the nature of it is as much unknown as ever, and we must despair of having any real knowledge at all about it, unless we will content ourselves with that which is to be acquired, *à posteriori*. The mind of man is an object of physics, as much as the body of man, or any other body: and the distinction that is made between physics and metaphysics, is quite arbitrary. His mind is part of his nature, as well as his body. Both of them together constitute his whole being, and as the first is the most noble part, I presume, we should determine his species by it principally, which we do not, if his mind was not more liable than his figure to be confounded with that of other animals. Let us content ourselves therefore to trace his mind, to observe its growth, and the progress it makes from its infancy to its maturity. Let us be content with particular, and experimental knowledge, upon which we may found a few general propositions, such as are or may be properly called *axiomata media*. But let us aim no longer at a general knowledge, too remote for our search; nor hope to discover more of intellectual nature by internal sense, than we are able to discover of corporeal nature by external. All that we can know of one and the other is, that we have such and such senses, and such and such faculties, and that divers sensations of the body and operations of the mind are produced in them on such and such apparent occasions.

* Malebranche. † Berkeley.

SECTION II.

To measure rightly our intellectual strength, and to apply it properly, in order neither to impose, nor to be imposed upon, is our point of view. I shall not, therefore, say any thing further about the nature of mind in general, that secret spring of thought, unknown and unknowable, but shall content myself to observe in Mr. Locke's method and with his assistance, something about the phenomena of the human mind, by which we may judge surely of the nature, extent, and reality of human knowledge. I say, we may judge surely of them; because our ideas are the foundations, or the materials, call them which you please, of all our knowledge; because without entering into an inquiry concerning the origin of them, we may know so certainly as to exclude all doubt, what ideas we have; and because, when we know this, we know with the same certainty, what kinds, and degrees of knowledge we have, and are capable of having.

Thus we know that the first ideas, with which the mind is furnished, are received from without, and are caused by such sensations, as the presence of external objects excites in us, according to laws of passion and action, which the Creator has established. What these laws are, and how external objects become able to make such impressions on our organs, we know as little, and it is impossible to know any thing less, as those philosophers do, who have pretended, most extravagantly, to explain these laws, and to account for these impressions; or as those philosophers know of another system, who denying, as extravagantly, that any such power can belong to body, and affirming that it is absurd to talk of passive power, confine all activity and ascribe all such ideas of sensation to spirit alone. We are far from knowing how body acts on body, or spirit on spirit; how body operates on mind, and produces thought, or how mind operates on body, and produces corporeal motion. But this I know, that a leaf of wormwood conveys to my mind, by the sense of sight, and that of touch, for instance, the ideas of color, extension, figure, and solidity, as certainly as I know that it conveys thither, by the sense of taste, the idea of bitter; and as certainly as I know that the act of my mind, called volition, produced the motion of my hand which gathered the leaf. Our ignorance of causes does not hinder our knowledge of effects. This knowledge has been thought sufficient for us, in these cases, by infinite wisdom: and nothing can be more ridiculous than to hear men affirm dogmatically, when they guess at most, and that very wildly, and very precariously.

As these ideas come to us from without, so there are others

that arise in the mind, and proceed from the perception of its own operations, to which a still greater number is to be added, that arise there from the concurrence of these joint causes, from perceptions of outward and inward operations, from external, and internal sense. Perception is the first faculty the mind exerts, and is common, whatever some of the others may be, to us and to the whole animal kind. The faculties that come in play afterwards seem to be active, but this seems to be passive; for we perceive ideas, however raised in the mind, whether we will or no: their *esse* is *percipi*, to have them we must perceive that we have them. Without this passive power, or this faculty, external objects might act upon us, but they would act to little purpose, for they would excite no ideas: as, on the other hand, without this action of external objects, the power or faculty of perception would be useless, or rather null, and by consequence all the other powers or faculties of the mind.

There is nothing, philosophically speaking, at least I could never find, to my sorrow, that there is any thing, which obliges us necessarily to conclude that we are a compound of material, and immaterial substance. If we are so, contrary to all appearances, (for they denote plainly one single system, all the parts of which are so intimately connected, and dependent one on another, that the whole begins, proceeds, and ends together,) this union of a body and a soul must be magical indeed, as Doctor Cudworth calls it. So magical, that the hypothesis serves to no purpose in philosophy, whatever it may do in theology, and is still less comprehensible than the hypothesis which assumes that, although our idea of thought be not included in the idea of matter, or body, as the idea of figure is, for instance, in that of limited extension, yet the faculty of thinking, in all the modes of thought, may have been superadded by Omnipotence to certain systems of matter; which it is not less than blasphemy to deny, though divines and philosophers, who deny it in terms, may be cited, and which, whether it be true or no, will never be proved false by a little metaphysical jargon about essences, and attributes, and modes.

But however this may be, concerning which it becomes men little to be as dogmatical as they are on one side of this question at least, and whatever strength and vigor, independent on the body, may be ascribed to the soul, the soul exerts none till it is roused into activity by sense. A jog, a knock, a thrust from without is not knowledge.* No. But, if we did not perceive these jogs, knocks, and thrusts from without, we should remain just as we came into the world, void even of the first elements

* Cudworth.

of knowledge. Not only the inward, active powers of the mind would be unemployed, but we may say, that they would be non-existent. The human soul is so far from being furnished with forms and ideas to perceive all things by, or from being impregnated, I would rather say than printed over, with the seeds of universal knowledge, that we have no ideas till we receive passively the ideas of sensible qualities from without. Then indeed the activity of the soul, or mind commences, and another source of original ideas is opened: for then we acquire ideas from, and by the operations of our minds. Sensation would be of little use to form the understanding, if we had no other faculty than mere passive perception; but without sensation these other faculties would have nothing to operate upon, reflection would have by consequence nothing to reflect upon, and it is by reflection that we multiply our stock of ideas, and fill that magazine, which is to furnish all the materials of future knowledge. In this manner, and in no other, we may say, that "all our ideas arise from our senses, and that there is nothing in the mind which was not previously in sense." But these propositions should not be advanced, perhaps, as generally as they are sometimes by logicians, lest they should lead into error, as maxims are apt to do very often. Sensation is the greater, reflection the smaller source of ideas. But these latter are as clear, and distinct, and convey knowledge that may be said to be more real than the former. Sense gave occasion to them, but they never were in sense properly speaking. They are, if I may say so, of the mind's own growth, the elements of knowledge, more immediate, less relative, and less dependent than sensitive knowledge, as any man will be apt to think, who compares his ideas of remembering, recollecting, bare thought, and intenseness of thought, with those of warm and hot, of cool and cold. Des Cartes might have said, "I see, I hear, I feel, I taste, I smell; therefore I am." But surely he might say too, "I think, I reflect, I will; therefore I am." Let us observe, however, that it belongs only to a great philosopher to frame an argument to prove to himself that he exists, which is an object of intuitive knowledge, and concerning which it is impossible he should have any doubt. In the mouth of any other person, "I think, therefore I am," would be very near akin to I am, therefore I am.*

Thus it will appear when we contemplate our understanding in the first step towards knowledge, that corporeal, animal sense,

* Je ne vois pas que vous ayes eu besoin d'un si grand appareil, puisque d'ailleurs vous etiez dejà certain de votre existence, et que vous pouviez inferer la même chose de quelque autre que ce fut de vos actions, etante manifeste par la lumiere naturelle que tout ce qui agit est, ou existe.—*Objec. of Gassendi to the second Medit.*

which some philosophers hold in great contempt, and which does not deserve much esteem, communicates to us our first ideas, sets the mind first to work, and becomes, in conjunction with internal sense, by which we perceive what passes within, as by the other what passes without us, the foundation of all our knowledge. This is so evidently true, that even those ideas, about which our reason is employed in the most abstract meditations, may be traced back to this original by a very easy analysis. Since these simple ideas, therefore, are the foundations of human knowledge, this knowledge can neither be extended wider, nor elevated higher than in a certain proportion to them. If we consider these ideas like foundations, they are extremely narrow, and shallow, neither reaching to many things, nor laid deep in the nature of any. If we consider them like materials, for so they may be considered likewise, employed to raise the fabric of our intellectual system, they will appear like mud, and straw, and lath, materials to erect some frail, and homely cottage, but not of substance, nor value sufficient for the construction of those enormous piles, from whose lofty towers philosophers would persuade us that they discover all nature subject to their inspection, that they pry into the source of all being, and into the inmost recesses of all wisdom. But it fares with them, as it did with the builders in the plains of Senaar, they fall into a confusion of languages, and neither understand one another, nor are understood by the rest of mankind.

Having taken this view of our first, and simple ideas, it is necessary, in order to make a true estimate of human knowledge, that we take such a view likewise of those faculties by the exercise of which our minds proceed in acquiring knowledge. I have mentioned perception; and retention, or memory ought to follow: for as we should have no ideas without perception, so we should lose them, as fast as we get them, without retention. When it was objected to Des Cartes that, if thought was the essence of the soul, the soul of the child must think in the mother's womb; and when he was asked, how then it came to pass that we remember none of those thoughts? he maintained, according to his usual method, one hypothesis by another, and assumed that memory consists in certain traces made on the brain by the thoughts that pass through it, and that as long as they last we remember, but that the brain of the child in the womb being too moist, and too soft to preserve these traces, it is impossible he should remember out of the womb what he thought in it. Thus memory seems to be made purely corporeal by the same philosopher, who makes it on some occasions purely intellectual. He might distinguish two memories by the same hypothetical power, by which he distinguished two substances, that

he might employ one or the other as his system required. If you consult other philosophers on the same subject, you will receive no more satisfaction: and the only reasonable method we can take, is to be content to know intuitively, and by inward observation, not the cause, but the effects of memory, and the use of it in the intellectual system.

By this faculty then, whatever it be, our simple ideas, which have been spoken of already, are preserved with greater, and our complex ideas, which remain to be spoken of, with less facility. Both one and the other require to be frequently raised in mind, and frequently recalled to it. I say, with the rest of the world, to be raised, and to be recalled; but surely these words come very short of expressing the wonderful phenomena of memory. The images that are lodged in it present themselves often to the mind without any fresh sensation, and so spontaneously, that the mind seems as passive in these secondary perceptions, as it was in receiving the first impressions. Our simple ideas, and even our complex ideas and notions, return sometimes of themselves, we know not why, nor how, mechanically, as it were, uncalled by the mind, and often to the disturbance of it in the pursuit of other ideas, to which these intruders are foreign. On the other hand, we are able, at our will and with design, to put a sort of force on memory, to seize, as it were, the end of some particular line, and to draw back into the mind, a whole set of ideas that seem to be strung to it, or linked one with the other. In general, when images, essences, ideas, notions, that existed in any mind, are gone out of it, and have no longer any existence there, the mind is often able to will them into existence again, by an act of which we are conscious, but of which we know nothing more, than that the mind performs it. These phenomena are more surprising, and less to be accounted for than the action of external objects on the organs of sense in the first production of ideas, which is an observation that deserves the notice of those philosophers who deny such action because they cannot comprehend it.

But still this faculty is proportioned to our imperfect natures, and therefore weak, slow, and uncertain in its operations. Our simple ideas fade in the mind, or fleet out of it, unless they are frequently renewed: and the most tenacious memory cannot maintain such as are very complex, without the greatest attention, and a constant care, not always with both. All our ideas in general are recalled slowly by some, and successively by every mind. Themistocles was famous, among other parts wherein he excelled, for his memory; but when he refused the offer Simonides made him, it was, I suppose because he did not want the poet's skill to improve his memory, and because he knew

by experience that the great defects of this faculty are neither to be cured, nor supplied by art. In what proportion soever it is given, it may be improved to some degree, no doubt, but memory will never present ideas to the human mind, as it does perhaps to superior intelligences, like objects in a mirror, where they may be viewed at every instant, all at once, without effort or toil, in their original freshness, and with their original precision, such as they were when they first came into the mind, or when they were first framed by it. Could memory serve us in this manner, our knowledge would be still very imperfect; but many errors into which we fall, and into which we are seduced, would be avoided, and the endless chicane of learned disputation would be stopped in a great measure. It is for this reason I have said so much of this faculty of the mind, as you will have occasion soon to observe.

The faculties, necessary for my purpose to be mentioned next, are those of compounding simple into complex ideas, and of comparing our ideas, which implies the just and nice discernment of them, in order to perceive the innumerable relations which they bear to one another. These are some of the steps by which the mind attempts to rise from particular to general knowledge. They have been called arts of the mind, but improperly, in some respects; for though the mind is forced to employ several arts, and to call in sense to the aid of intellect, even after it has full possession of its ideas, to help out its imperfect manner of knowing, and to lengthen a little its short tether; yet the composition, and comparison of ideas is plainly a lesson of nature: this lesson is taught us by the very first sensations we have. As the mind does not act till it is roused into action by external objects; so when it does act, it acts conformably to the suggestions it receives from these impressions, and takes with its first ideas the hints how to multiply, and improve them. If nature makes us lame, she gives crutches to lean upon. She helps us to walk where we cannot run, and to hobble where we cannot walk. She takes us by the hand, and leads us by experience to art.

Nature then has united in distinct substances, as we commonly speak, various combinations of those qualities, each of which causes in us the sensation it is appropriated to cause, and our organs are fitted to receive; so that several being thus combined, and making their impression together, may be said to cause a complex sensation. Thus we receive, among other ideas, those of soft and warm at the same instant, from the same piece of wax; or of hard and cold from the same piece of ice. Thus again; we receive the more complex ideas which substances still more composed, that is, substances wherein a greater variety of these qualities co-exists, are fitted to raise in us, such, for instance,

as the idea of a man, or a horse. As soon as we are born, various appearances present themselves to the sight, the din of the world strikes our ears, in short a multitude of impressions made on the tender organs of sense convey a multitude of ideas simple and complex, confusedly, and continually into the mind. The latter indeed, whether nature obtrudes them, or we make them, are composed of the former, and therefore we give very properly the first place to these in all discourses concerning ideas. But they have a priority of order rather than of existence; for the complex idea of the nurse comes into the mind as soon as the eyes of the child are opened, and is most probably the first idea received by the sight, though the simple idea produced by the taste of milk may have got into the mind a little sooner. Nor does the lesson of nature end here: she carries it on to all the different compositions of our simple ideas, and to all the different combinations we frame of our simple and complex ideas; from substances to mode, the dependencies, and affections of substances, and from them to the relations of things one to another; that is, she carries it on to all the operations of the mind, and to all the objects of our thoughts in the acquisition of knowledge.

If I meant by modes nothing but manners of being as some do, I should not ascribe our ideas of them to a further lesson of nature. She taught us this lesson, when she obtruded on us the complex ideas of substances. At least it seems so to me, who cannot comprehend the distinction of substances, and of mode or manner of being, as of two ideas that may be perceived separately, the one of a thing that subsists by itself, the other of a manner of being which cannot subsist by itself, but determines this thing to be what it is. I cannot consider a mode without referring it in my mind to something, of which it is or may be the mode: neither can I consider a substance otherwise than relatively to its modes, as something whereof I have no idea, and in which the modes, of which I have ideas, subsist. The complex idea we have, of every substance, is nothing more than a combination of several sensible ideas which determine the apparent nature of it to us. I say the apparent nature, and to us; for I cannot agree that these modes, such of them as fall under our observation, limit the real nature, or determine even the apparent nature to other beings. On the whole it will appear, whenever we consider this matter further, that the far greatest part of what has been said by philosophers about being, and substance, indeed all they have advanced beyond those clear and obvious notions which every thinking man frames, or may frame without their help, is pure jargon, or else something very trite, disguised under a metaphysical mask, and called by a hard name ontology, or ontosophy.

But to proceed, or rather to return; I understand by mode, in this place something else, something that carries our knowledge further than the complex ideas of substances. I understand in short what Mr. Locke understands by simple and mixed modes. The various combinations that our minds make of the same simple idea, and the various compositions that they make of simple ideas of different kinds. These ideas added to those of substances, and the whole stock completed by such as the mind acquires of the relation of its ideas, in comparing them as far as it is able to compare them, make up the entire system of human knowledge: and in the process of it from first to last, we are assisted directly or indirectly by the lessons of nature that have been, or that are to be mentioned.

Ideas of things computable, and measurable are the objects of mathematics. Ideas of moral, and immoral actions are the objects of ethics. From whence has the mathematician his first ideas of number, or his first ideas of solid extension, of lines, surfaces, and figures? From whence has the moralist his first ideas of happiness, and unhappiness, of good, and evil? The mind can exercise a power, in some sort arbitrary, over all its simple ideas, that is, it can repeat them at its pleasure, and it can frame them into complex ideas, without any regard to actual, though with a regard to possible existence; which regard will be always preserved, unless the mind be disordered. The mind then has a power of framing all the different compositions, and combinations of ideas, about which these sciences are conversant; but yet these operations are not performed by the native energy of the mind alone, without any help, without any pattern. Nature lends the help, nature sets the pattern, when complex ideas of these modes and relations force themselves on the mind, as the complex ideas of substances do.

That every distinct object of external, and internal sense gives us the idea of an unit, or of one, is obvious to reflection: and I think it is no less obvious, that these objects suggest to the mind, nay oblige the mind to make various repetitions of this idea, and to frame all the simple modes of number by adding unit to unit. Thus for instance, we look up by day and we see one sun, by night and we see one moon. Plutarch's countryman, indeed, counted two moons; for he could not conceive that the moon he had left behind him in Bœotia, and that he saw at Athens, were the same. But though we see but one sun, and one moon, we see many stars. We attempt to count them, that is, we assign marks, or sounds to signify how many times we repeat the idea of an unit, which each of them gives us separately; or else we form a confused idea of numberless repetitions of this idea, like the savages who lift up both hands, and extend their fingers to

show that they have seen ten suns on their journey, or hold out a handful of their hair when they want to signify a number of suns which they cannot signify otherwise; because they have neither sounds, nor marks for the greater collections of units.

As arithmetic is one, so is geometry another constituent part of mathematics, and the very name points out to us, not only the objects, but the original of this science. I do not believe, on the word of Herodotus, nor even of Strabo, that the Egyptians were the inventors of it. I believe this, almost as little, as I believe on the word of Josephus, that antediluvian astronomers had engraved their observations on two pillars which existed in his time. But this tradition, whereby the invention of geometry is ascribed to a nation more ancient than tradition itself, though it may be fabulous, communicates to us, like many others that are so, a true fact. The true fact, I think, is this; that as soon as men ceased to range the woods, and plains in common, like their fellow animals, if they ever did so: as soon as societies were formed, and in those societies a division of property was made; nature, that led them to assign, led them to ascertain possessions. They did both, most probably, at first by sight, and guess. They paced out these possessions afterwards in length, and breadth; and ideas of modes of space were framed like ideas of modes of number: an unit twelve times repeated makes a dozen, twenty times repeated it makes a score. The length of one of their feet was, to these first geometricians, like an unit to the first arithmeticians. So many feet, five, I think, according to Pliny, made a pace, and one hundred and five-and-twenty of these made a stated measure of distance that continued long in use; for the stadium consisted of one hundred and twenty-five paces, according to the same author. Thus measuring, the practical part of geometry, came into use: and when it had been applied to two dimensions, it was soon applied to all three. The use of it was great, not only in the first distribution of property, but in every alteration of it, and especially after such confusions of it, as the inundations of the Nile might cause annually in Egypt, or other devastations in that and in other countries.

Nature that urged men, by necessity, to invention, helped them to invent. The natural face of a country taught them to give it an artificial face, and their own first rude essays in laying out lands, and building habitations, led them to contemplate the properties of lines, surfaces, and solids; and, little by little, to form that science, the pride of the human intellect, which has served to so many great and good purposes, and the application of which is grown, or growing perhaps, into some abuse. Nature set the example, example begot imitation, imitation practice, practice introduced speculation, and speculation in its turn im-

proved practice. I might easily run through other examples of the same kind, to show how the first principles of arts and sciences are derived from ideas furnished by the productions, and operations of nature, such as our senses represent them to us; nay, how instinct instructs reason, the instinct of other animals the reason of man. But this would be superfluous trouble in writing to you, who have touched this subject so well, where you introduce nature speaking to man, in the third of your ethic epistles.

I will only mention, as I proposed to do, the ideas, or notions, about which moral philosophy is conversant. I distinguish here, which I should have done perhaps sooner, and I think with good reason, between ideas, and notions; for it seems to me, that as we compound simple into complex ideas, so the compositions we make of simple, and complex ideas may be called, more properly, and with less confusion and ambiguity, notions. Simple ideas, simple modes, complex ideas, mixed modes, and relations of all these, as well as the relations of the relations, are frequently blended together voluntarily, as use invites, or judgment directs; and, thus blended, they may therefore seem to be original, and untaught. But yet certain it is, that such notions as these obtrude themselves on the mind, as naturally and as necessarily, though not so directly nor immediately, as the complex ideas of substances, or any other complex ideas. Let us observe this in an example. We see one man kill another: and the complex idea, signified by the word kill, is obtruded on our sense as much as the complex idea of the man killed, or of his killer. The mind retains this image, and joining to it various ideas of circumstances and relations, of causes and effects, of motives and consequences, all which ideas have been raised in our minds by experience and observation, such notions as we intend by the words murder, assassination, parricide, or fratricide, are framed.

Nature teaches us, by experience and observation, not only to extend our notions, but to distinguish them with greater precision, just as we learn to rectify simple ideas of sensation, and to control sense by sense, if I may say so. Mr. Locke observes, that we learn first the names of these complex ideas and notions from other men, and the signification of them afterwards. Which is true, and it is the most early, and most common method whereby we acquire them. But this makes no alteration in the case. Whether the impressions that excited these complex ideas, and gave the mind occasion and means to form these notions, were made on our minds, or on the minds of other men; and whether the names that signify them were given by us, or by others, it is plain that nature taught mankind to make them, directly when she obtruded them, and indirectly when we seemed to invent

them without any assistance from outward objects. The first is evident of itself, and the second will appear so too, if we consider that in learning their names, and the signification of these names, we learned to decompound them; and that by learning to decompound some, the mind was instructed to compound others, even such, perhaps, as existed by these means in idea and notion, before the combinations, whereof they became the archetypes, existed in act. Our ideas of relations, and of the relations of relations which are comprehended so often in our complex ideas, or notions, are not positive beings that exist by themselves, and can be contemplated by themselves. Modes are the affections and dependences of substances; relations are the affections and dependences of substances and modes; and no one of them can exist any longer than both the ideas that produced it, or by the comparison of which it was framed, subsist. It might seem therefore the less likely, that outward objects should communicate such ideas to the mind, or even instruct the mind to frame them; yet so it is. That act of the mind that sets two objects before our internal sight, and by referring from one to the other includes both in the same consideration, is plainly suggested to us by the operations of outward objects on our senses. We can neither look up nor down, without perceiving ideas of bigger and less, of more and fewer, of brighter and darker, and a multitude of other relations, the ideas of which arise in the mind as fast as the ideas of things of which they express the relations, and almost prevent reflection. When the mind, thus taught, employs reflection, the number of these relative ideas increases vastly. Thus, for instance, when we observe the alterations that are made by nature, or by art, in our complex ideas of substances, or when we reflect on the continual vicissitude and flux of all the affections and passions, and the consequences of them, how can we avoid framing the ideas of cause and effect? That which produces, or seems to us to produce the alteration gives us the idea of cause, and that which receives the alteration gives us the idea of effect. I go no further into the consideration of our ideas of relations physical, and moral. They are numberless, and they must needs be so; since every idea, or notion we have, though it be in itself one single object of thought, becomes the object of a thousand when it is compared with all those with which it may be compared in some respect or other.

SECTION III.

These, and such as these are all the ideas we have really, and are capable of having, derived originally from sense, external

and internal. These too, and such as these are the faculties by which we improve and increase our stock, and such as all these are, such must our knowledge be; for since human knowledge is nothing else that the perception of the agreement or disagreement, connection or repugnancy of our ideas, those that are simple must determine the nature of those that are complex; those that are complex that of our notions; our notions that of the principles we establish, and that of the principles we establish that of all the consequences we draw from them. Error, in any one step of this gradation, begets error in all that follow: and though we compare ever so exactly, conclude ever so truly, and in a word reason ever so well, our reasoning must terminate in error whenever this happens. It cannot terminate in knowledge. But before I leave this subject, I must go over it again, that I may carry the reflections upon it further.

How inadequate our ideas are to the nature of outward objects, and how imperfect, therefore, all our knowledge is concerning them, has been observed transiently above, and has been too often and too well explained to be over much insisted on by me. That there are such objects, material objects, neither spirits nor ideas, and that they act in one another and on us in various manners, and according to various laws, no man can doubt, any more than he can doubt of that perception by which he distinguishes their presence and their absence, according to the difference between the ideas they excite in one case, and those he retains in the other. We can doubt of this, I think, no more than we can doubt whether we are free agents, or whether we are necessarily determined to all we do; no more than we can doubt of many other things of which philosophers have pretended to doubt, or have really doubted: for either, they have meant on many occasions to exercise their wit, and to triumph in the subtilty of their genius, or they have been transported by overheated imaginations into a philosophical delirium. The first have perplexed knowledge more than they have improved it: and if the last have not made many converts, whilst they have argued against self-evidence, they have multiplied useless disputes, and misspent much time.

Here, then, at our first setting out in the survey of knowledge, we find an immense field in which we cannot range, no, nor so much as enter beyond the outskirts of it: the rest is impenetrable to us, and affords not a single path to conduct us forward. Could we range in that field, we should be unable to walk in our own. I mean, that if our senses were able to discover to us the inmost constitutions, and the real essences of outward objects, such senses would render us unfit to live, and act in the system to which we belong. If the system was not made for us, who

pretend on very weak grounds, I think, to be the final cause of it, we at least were made for the system, and for the part we bear, among terrestrial animals. Other creatures there may be, and I believe readily there are, who have finer senses than men, as well as superior intelligence to apply and improve the ideas they receive by sensation. The inmost constitutions, the real essences of all the bodies that surround them, may lie constantly open to such creatures; or they may be able, which is a greater advantage still, so "to frame, and shape to themselves organs of sensation, as to suit them to their present design, and the circumstances of the object they would consider," according to that supposition which Mr. Locke calls an extravagant conjecture of his, but which that great man might very reasonably make; since it assumes no more than this, that some other creatures are able to do by their natural constitution, and so as to obtain full and absolute knowledge, what we are able to do by art very imperfectly, and yet so as to attain a greater degree of partial and relative knowledge than our senses, unassisted by art, could communicate to us.

But be this as it will, concerning which we can only guess; it is, I think, evident, that although outward objects make impressions on the organs of sense, and may be said therefore to cause sensations, yet these sensations are determined in the whole animal kind that we know, and to which we belong, according to the constitutions of the several species, as these constitutions are framed according to the uses and ends for which each species is designed, and to which it is directed. Innumerable instances might be brought to illustrate, and confirm this truth. It will be sufficient to do so by making a few short observations on our own species alone. The same outward objects then produce the same sensations in all men, as far as self-preservation is immediately concerned: and there is at least an apparent uniformity of sensations in all other cases, sufficient to maintain the commerce of men one with another, to direct their mutual offices without confusion, and to answer all the ends of society. Further than to these purposes, the determination of their sensations does not seem to be in all men the same. The same objects seem to cause different, and opposite sensations in many particular instances, in as much as they give pleasure, and excite desire in one man, whilst they give no pleasure, nor excite any desire, nay whilst they give pain, and provoke aversion in another. All men feel alike the effects of fire that burns, or of steel that divides their flesh: and my butler, who has tasted both, will not bring me a bottle of wormwood-wine when I ask for a bottle of sack. But yet the Greenlander quaffs his bowl of whale's-grease with as much pleasure as you and I drink our

bowl of punch: and if his liquor appears nauseous to us, ours appears so to him. Habit, that second nature, may sometimes account, as well as sickness, for this difference that seems to be in human sensations. But still it will remain true, that this difference, in many and various instances, proceeds from our first nature, if I may say so; that is, from a difference in the original constitution of those particular bodies in which this apparent difference of sensation is perceivable. The principle of this diversity is as unknown to us as the more general principle of uniformity; but whether it be laid in the natural constitution, or in the alterations that habit or sickness may produce, our observation will be verified, that human sensations are determined by the actual disposition, whether original or accidental, of human bodies, and cannot therefore help to communicate to us any knowledge of the inward constitutions, or real essences of the bodies which excite them, nor indeed any knowledge but of themselves. To discover in what manner, and by what powers, external action and internal passion co-operate to produce sensation, it is in vain to attempt: and a philosophical mind will be much better employed in admiring and adoring the divine wisdom that appears equally in the diversity, and in the uniformity of our sensations, as it would not be hard to show if this was a place for those reflections, than in such vain researches. Vain indeed they will appear to be to any man of sense, who considers with attention and without prepossession, what has been written on this subject by men of the greatest genius.

But as vain as these researches are, and as impossible as it is to know more of our sensations than that we have them, and that we receive them from outward objects, yet are we not to think the use of our senses as limited, as Malebranche would have us believe it to be. They were given,* he says, for the preservation of our bodies, and not to teach us truth. The first part of this assertion is agreeable to the system of nature. The latter is agreeable, I think, to no system but that of his own imagining, which is so extravagantly hypothetical in many, and the principal parts, that it has made no great fortune in the world, though the utmost subtilty of wit, and all the powers of language are employed to support it. Notwithstanding, therefore, such systems as these, for it is not single of its kind, we may continue to believe what constant experience dictates to us, that our senses, though few, confined, and fallible, are given not only for the preservation of our bodies, but to let into the human mind the first elements of knowledge, and to assist, and direct the mind in all the progress it makes afterwards.

* Recherche de la Verité, l. 1, c. 10.

That human knowledge is relative, not absolute, has been said already. We neither do, nor can know the real essence of any one substance in the world, not of our own: and when we talk of the powers, and qualities, and sometimes of the natures of substances, either we talk ignorantly, or we refer to their effects, by which alone we distinguish them, and in which alone we know any thing of them. They who distinguish between the primary, and secondary qualities of substances, do not so much as pretend that the secondary qualities, such as colors, or tastes for instance, are any representations of the outward existences that cause them: and the disputes about solidity, extension, and motion which is mobility in action, as mobility is motion in power, show how inadequate our ideas are of the primary qualities; though these are said to be resemblances of patterns really existing in all bodies whether we perceive them or not.

But though the knowledge here spoken of be not complete, nor absolute, because our ideas, concerning which alone human knowledge is conversant, are inadequate to the nature of things; yet is it real knowledge in some degree, and relatively to us. This I mean. Our simple ideas, whose various co-existences compose all our complex ideas of substances, are certainly adequate in this sense; they are real effects of real powers, and such as the all-wise Author of nature has ordained these powers to produce in us. I say in us, for it is not incongruous to suppose, nor will these ideas be less adequate, nor this knowledge less real, if it be so that the same powers may be ordained to produce other effects on other creatures of God. This paper gives me the idea that I call white; it may give some other idea to some other creature. These ideas are different, but they are both adequate to our use, and the knowledge real; for they are both real, and natural effects of real, corresponding powers.

As low as these principles, of any real knowledge that we can acquire of substances, are laid, it is from them we must take our rise: and there is no wonder therefore if we proceed slowly, and have not been able to proceed far even since the study of nature has been pursued in a right method. Whilst the symbolical physics of Pythagoreans and Platonists prevailed, and whilst natural philosophy was made to consist in little else than a logical cant, which Aristotle invented, and his disciples propagated, error was cultivated instead of science, ignorance was masked, and men passed for naturalists without any knowledge of nature. The case would be much the same if some modern philosophers could have succeeded in establishing a supposed science that they call metaphysics, to be like a higher ground from which we might descend to physics, from generals to particulars, from speculations about what may be, down to affirmations about what is. But

there have been men since the resurrection of letters, at the head of whom our Verulam justly claims his place, who have delivered common sense from the chains of authority, and by exposing ancient, have put us on our guard against many of those modern whimsies. The generality of philosophers, therefore, have been far from adopting this inverted rule, this unnatural method of studying nature. They have seen not only that laborious industry is the price imposed on all our acquisitions of knowledge, but that natural knowledge, the knowledge, I should say, of the system of nature, can never be real, unless it be begun, and carried on by the painful drudgery of experiment. *Extunditur usu.*

By experiments well made, for they too may be made ill, these men have acquired a knowledge of some particular substances, of those at least which are nearest to them, which they can handle, and even torture at their pleasure, and force, if I may say so, to give them information. The knowledge I mean is that of the sensible qualities and powers, co-existing in each particular substance: and this is real knowledge as far as it goes, according to what has been explained above. When a multitude of particular substances are thus known, and thus distinguished, philosophers venture to frame general propositions concerning them, and concerning others too, by the help of analogy: and when the propositions, and the conclusions drawn from them are confirmed by uniform experience, they acquire a probability almost equivalent to certainty, and which must be accepted for it. This, however, is not strictly knowledge. The naturalist who has made a thousand experiments, with the utmost care and skill; the chemist who has, in like manner, decomposed a thousand natural, and composed as many artificial bodies, are still liable to be deceived; because it may happen that the action of one particular body shall not produce sometimes the same effects, which the actions of other bodies of the same specific appearance has produced on innumerable trials. Our real knowledge goes no further than particular experiment: and as we attempt to make it general, we make it precarious. The reason is plain. It is a knowledge of particular effects that have no connection, nor dependency one on another, even when they, or more properly the powers that produce them, are united in the same substance: and of these powers considered as causes, and not in their effects, we have no means of attaining any knowledge at all. It may be, that bodies act on one another, according to their bulk, figure, and texture of their solid parts, by motion and pulsion, or gravity and attraction. It may be, that their action proceeds from other causes, so remote from all human conception, that we are unable not only to guess at them, but even to suspect that they are. But whatever they be, since they are neither known nor know-

able by us, what have philosophers to do more than to redouble their industry in multiplying experiments, as much as they have means and opportunities of doing, since there may be a deficiency, but never an excess of them? Thus they may proceed in obtaining knowledge of particular substances by the help of their senses, and in improving and applying this knowledge to greater advantage by the help of their intellect. Sense and intellect must conspire in the acquisition of physical knowledge; but the latter must never proceed independently of the former. Experiment is that pillar of fire, which can alone conduct us to the promised land: and they who lose sight of it, lose themselves in the dark wilds of imagination. This many have done from the infancy of philosophy, which has lasted longer than we are apt to imagine; and which one might be tempted to think, on some occasions, continues still, by a fondness to retain some of the rattles and baubles of early ages. These rattles and baubles have been laid aside, however, by no philosophers so much as by those who have applied them to cultivate experimental physics: and therefore as imperfect as our knowledge of nature is, and must be always, yet has it been more advanced within less than two centuries, than it had been in twenty that preceded them.

All the helps, that human wit and industry can procure, have been employed. Microscopes and telescopes have been invented. Geometry has been applied to natural philosophy, and algebra to geometry. With all these helps, our knowledge of nature has advanced in degree, but not in kind. There are miscroscopical corpuscles in bodies, as there are telescopical stars in the heavens, neither of which can be discovered without the help of one, or the other, of these glasses. But with this help, we can no more discover all the corpuscles of any one body, than we can all the stars of the universe: and besides, as to the former, if glasses could magnify enough to expose them all to our sight, we should know indeed more component particles of bodies, but we should remain as ignorant of their mechanical affections as we now are; because we should remain ignorant of the mechanical affections of these corpuscles, or of that inward spring which puts these atoms in motion, and directs their several operations.

As to the celestial bodies which are objects of astronomical observation, they must be reckoned objects of natural philosophy likewise; since they are parts of the same universal system of nature. We take up the telescope, indeed, and not the microscope to contemplate them, because they are at such immense distances from us: and we are so little concerned to know of what substances they are composed, or what substances they contain, that if we were not hindered by the utter impossibility, we might be so by the apparent inutility, from attempting to acquire any

such knowledge of them, as we labor to acquire of the outward objects that environ us in our own planet. This planet is our home, and it imports us to know as much as we can of the inward structure and furniture of it. We have not the same concern about other habitations. But it is agreeable, and in some respects useful, to know the general face of the country about us. It is probable that mere curiosity begat astronomy: and that the uses, to which this noble science is applicable, were discovered afterwards. I am apt to think, that the first men were excited more to physical researches, by the shining phenomena of the heavens, than by those of the earth. Their wants forced them to look down; but as the most immediate of these were supplied, they began to look up again: and the men who had least to do, Egyptian or Chaldean shepherds, perhaps, were the first astronomers. But as mean and rude as the beginnings of it were, astronomy was soon cultivated by the most learned men, and by the greatest princes, if we believe the traditions of antiquity concerning Belus, Atlas, and others, to have had any foundation in the truth of things. Thus much is sure, it has been cultivated many thousands of years, and wherever arts and sciences have flourished, this science has flourished at the head of them.

It is lawful, methinks, to conclude from hence, that a science, which it has been the business of learned men in all countries, where learning has flourished, to advance, would have been brought to a great degree of perfection, if there had been any near proportion between the object of it and human means of knowledge. But as some bodies baffle our inquiries, and escape our knowledge by being too minute, these enormous masses do the same by being too remote. Our sense of sight fails us; and when our senses fail us in natural philosophy, whose object is actual not possible existence, our intellect is of little use. It may be said, it will be said, that our knowledge of the heavenly bodies is brought to a great degree of perfection, and is going on daily to a greater, by the incessant labors of many learned men; that we have a much more extensive, a more exact, and a truer view of the phenomena than ever, by the vast advances that have been made in every part of mathematics; that we calculate their magnitudes, measure their distances, determine their figures, describe their orbits, compute the degrees of their velocity, and perform a multitude of other operations concerning them, the result of every one of which is knowledge, with the utmost accuracy. It will be added, that we are not only thus able to account for appearances, but that we penetrate into the physical causes of them, that we discover the forces by which these bodies act on one another, the laws of their motion, and of their direction, by

which the order and harmony of the whole system is governed and maintained.

This may be said, and more to the same effect, without contradiction on my part; for it is true in the main, truer than panegyric is generally. But still I apprehend, that when we consider the whole matter, as it must be considered to make a true estimate of the extent of this knowledge, that is, when we compare the objects of this science with the progress that has been made in it, by the united labors of mankind, we shall find much more reason to admire the industry and perseverance of philosophers, than to applaud their success. What do we know beyond our solar system? We know indeed just enough to give us nobler, and more magnificent ideas of the works of God, than ancient philosophy could suggest. We know that this system to which our planet belongs, and beyond which men did not carry their thoughts anciently nor suspect any other, is but a minute part of the immense system of the universe, of the τὸ πᾶν as you Greeks, I think, call it. But as to any particular knowledge that we have, or even imagine that we have, it is next to nothing. Well may we be thus ignorant of all the solar systems beyond our own, the very phenomena of which, except the twinkling of some of their suns and our fixed stars, are imperceptible to human sight; when there are so many phenomena in our own solar system, for which we cannot account, and so many others, probably, that we have not yet discovered; when there are, even in that of the earth we inhabit, so many things that have hitherto escaped the utmost penetration of our senses, and the utmost efforts of our intellect, with all the assistance that art can give to both. We cannot trace the course of comets, for instance, through all their oblique orbits: but can we trace the circulation of water that falls on our earth in rain, or that rises in springs? "Veniet tempus," says Seneca in the seventh book of his Natural Questions, "quo ista, quæ nunc latent, in lucem dies extrahet; et, longioris ævi diligentia, veniet tempus quo posteri nostri tam aperta nos nescisse mirentur." This time may come, perhaps; but if we judge of what is to come by what is past, we may be tempted to think that the revolution of the Platonic year will be complete as soon.

The progress of a science, which, like this of natural philosophy, is the work of ages, must be liable, as it hath been and will be, to various interruptions. The ground that has been gained will be frequently lost. The latest systems or hypotheses may not be always the truest: and when they are so, the advancement of science may not be accelerated by them as much as it has been retarded by those that were false. In a word, I do not believe that Seneca would be so much surprised if he rose

from the dead, as we may imagine, at the progress that has been made since his days. What further progress will be made depends on many contingences, and it is hard to say. But this is sure, that although knowledge acquired facilitates the acquisition of more to a certain point, yet the progress we attempt to make beyond that point grows more and more difficult, and becomes a little sooner, or a little later, quite impracticable; for nothing can be truer in physics, as well as in those general reasonings which are called metaphysics, than what Montaigne has said, "les extremitez de notre perquisition tombent toutes en eblouissement."

Let us carry these reflections one step further, and we shall have carried them as far as is necessary, to show how little we are fitted to acquire the knowledge to which we aspire, and which we sometimes pretend that we have, concerning bodies either terrestrial or celestial. To investigate truth with success, in mathematics, in natural philosophy, and indeed on every occasion where it is difficult to be found, the analytic method must be employed not only in the first place, but as far as it can be employed about the objects of our inquiry. It has been much improved, and it has been thus employed, by the moderns. Many of them have been careful to make all the observations and experiments in their power, and from them they have drawn general conclusions by induction. This now is the utmost that our nature, and the nature of things without us, admit to be done: and when it is so well done, that no objection, drawn from experience, can be made to these conclusions, they have a right to be placed in the rank of things known by us. But let us not be mistaken. Though this be human, it is not absolute knowledge; because it is not founded in absolute certainty. Further discoveries of the phenomena may contradict these conclusions: or, supposing no such discoveries to be made, other conclusions may be deducible from the same phenomena, or other causes of them may be assignable, for aught we know. So far is this method of reasoning, from particular observations and experiments to general conclusions by induction, from amounting to real demonstration, though it be the best in our power.

This is the case when the minds of men are bent solely to the discovery of truth. But something worse happens when human affections and passions mingle in their inquiries, as they often do; for philosophers are not free from them. The Stoics themselves, with all their boasted apathy, were as little so as any other men. When this happens, philosophers hasten too much from the analytic to the synthetic method, that is, they draw general conclusions from too small a number of particular observations, and experiments: or, without giving themselves even this trouble,

they assume causes, and principles before established, as if they were certain truths, and argue from them. Nothing can be more absurd than these proceedings. It is agreed, I think, out of the schools at least, that Aristotle was eminently guilty of them; for he dealt more in common notions, than experiments, and built a world with categories, that is, by a certain logical arrangement of words: and yet even Aristotle seems to have warned philosophers against this abuse; for he taught, according to the report of Sextus Empiricus, that they should not neglect sense and seek for reasons, "posthabito sensu quærere rationem;" that is, that they should not carry speculation further than experiment and observation authorise it first, and confirm it afterwards. The principal reasons of a contrary conduct may be found in laziness, and vanity; in the first sometimes, in the other always. Philosophers have found it more easy, and more compendious to imagine, than to discover; to guess, than to know. They have taken, therefore, this way to fame, which has been their object, at least, as much as truth: and many a wild hypothesis has passed for a real system.

Strato was a famous philosopher, the scholar of Theophrastus, and the master of Ptolemy Philadelphus. As little, and as ill as we are informed of the state of natural philosophy among the more ancient naturalists of Greece, such as Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Democritus, and others, whose names are preserved though their works are lost, we know enough of Plato and Aristotle, whose works have been preserved, perhaps more to the detriment than to the advancement of learning, to determine what the state of it was in the days of Strato. We know that it was no longer the study of nature by observation, and experiment; but that it consisted in a jargon of words, or at best in some vague hypothetical reasonings: and yet Strato, who could not have told the Egyptian king how the idea of purple, the color of his robe, was produced, pretended to account for all the phenomena, and among other doctrines, to establish that of the plenum, for he laughed at the vacuum, as well as at the whole atomical system of Democritus.

Hypotheses are much in the favor of some philosophers; for there have been many Stratos even among the moderns. But hypotheses may be employed without being abused. In all our attempts to account for the phenomena of nature, there will be something hypothetical necessarily included. The analytic method itself, our surest road to science, does not conduct us further than extreme probability, as it has been observed; and this probability must stand us in lieu of certainty. But when we cannot arrive by this method at such a probability, is it reasonable to make an hypothesis? Is it reasonable, when we

cannot draw from observation and experiment, such conclusions as may be safe foundations on which to proceed by the synthetic method in the pursuit of truth, to assume certain principles, as if they were founded in the analytic method, which have been never proved, nor perhaps suggested by the phenomena, in hopes that they may be so afterwards? In a word, when the only clue we have fails us; which is most reasonable, to stop short, or to push forwards without any clue at all into the labyrinth of nature? I make no scruple of deciding in a case, so plain, that it would be a silly affectation of modesty, not modesty, to hesitate. When the phenomena do not point out to us any sufficient reason why, and how a thing is as we discover it to be, nor the efficient cause of it, there is a sufficient reason for stopping short, and confessing our ignorance; but none for seeking, out of the phenomena, this reason, and this cause which we cannot find in them. This is learned ignorance, of which the greatest philosophers have no reason to be ashamed. "Rationem—harum gravitatis proprietatum ex phænomenis nondum potui deducere, et hypotheses non fingo," said our Newton, after having advanced natural knowledge far beyond his cotemporaries, on the sure foundations of experiment, and geometry. How preferable is this learned ignorance to that ignorant learning, of which so many others have foolishly boasted? Des Cartes, who mingled so much hypothetical with so much real knowledge, boasted in a letter to his intimate friend the minime Mersenne, "that he should think he knew nothing in natural philosophy, if he was only able to say how things may be, without demonstrating that they cannot be otherwise." Leibnitz, who dealt in little else than hypotheses, speaking, in his reply to Bayle's reflections on his pre-established harmony, of the ridiculous whimsy of his Monades, and the rest of his metaphysical trash, compares himself to Antæus; asserts that "every objection gives him new strength," and boasts vainly, that he might say without vanity, "omnia præcepi, atque animo mecum antè peregi."

It will be urged, perhaps, as decisive in favor of hypotheses, that they may be of service, and can be of no disservice to us, in our pursuit of knowledge. A hypothesis founded on mere arbitrary assumptions will be a true hypothesis, and therefore of service to philosophy, if it is confirmed by many observations afterwards, and if no one phenomenon stand in opposition to it. A hypothesis that appears inconsistent with the phenomena will be soon demonstrated false, and as soon rejected. This reasoning, which is the sum of all that can be said for them, will not hold good, I think, in either case, enough to countenance the abuse of them, which is made by the very persons who urge this plea in favor of them. That such a hypothesis may be true,

is within the bounds of possibility; because it implies no contradiction to suppose that men, who pass their lives in guessing, may guess sometimes right. A man may throw ten sixes with ten dice; but no man in his senses would lay that he did, nor venture his stake on such a chance. In the other case, it is true that a hypothesis inconsistent with the phenomena may be soon demonstrated false. But it is not true that it will be as soon rejected. If philosophers are fond of making hypotheses, their disciples are as zealous to defend them. The honor of a whole sect is thought to be engaged, and every individual is piqued that another should show that to be false, which he has all his life taken to be true; so that notwithstanding all the graces of novelty, a new truth will have much to do to dislodge an old error. Instances of this sort are innumerable. Let us produce one from astronomy itself.

If any hypothesis was ever assumed with a plausible probability, that which we call the Ptolemaic was so. The apparent face of the heavens led men to it. We may say that the phenomena suggested it, and that the revolution of the sun, planets, and stars, in several spheres round the earth, could scarcely be doubted of by men who assumed any general conclusions, instead of drawing them all from a long course of particular observations carefully and learnedly made. The plausibility of this false hypothesis, and the authority of the peripatetic school established it on the ruins of the true system which Pythagoras had brought long before into Italy from the east, and which was probably that of the Egyptian and Chaldean astronomers. False as it was, it maintained its credit thirteen or fourteen centuries, if we reckon only from the time of the Alexandrian astronomer Ptolemy to that of Copernicus. Many difficulties had occurred, but as fast as they did so, new assumptions were made to reconcile them, till the whole became one complicated heap of hypothesis upon hypothesis. It was banished at last, and a truer system took its place. The fauters of hypotheses would have us believe, that even the detection of their falsehood gives occasion to our improvement in knowledge. But the road to truth does not lie through the precincts of error, and the improvement of astronomy was not owing to the destruction of the Ptolemaic hypothesis; but the destruction of this hypothesis was owing to the improvement of astronomy. If this hypothesis had never been made, Copernicus would not have had the honor of reviving the Pythagorean system, but mankind would have had the benefit of pursuing, without interruption, a system founded on knowledge, instead of pursuing, during an interval of so many centuries, a hypothesis founded on assumption.

To this ancient, let us join a modern instance to suggest the

same reflections, and confirm the same proofs. The system of Des Cartes dazzled and imposed at first. It was soon attacked, however, but it has not been so soon defeated. No man, perhaps, was ever so fit, as this philosopher, to make and maintain a hypothesis; to assume, and to improve and defend his assumptions. The notion he entertained and propagated, that there is, besides clear ideas, a kind of inward sentiment of evidence, which may be a principle of knowledge, is, I suppose, dangerous in physical inquiries as well as in abstract reasoning. He who departs from the analytic method, to establish general propositions concerning the phenomena on assumptions, and who reasons from these assumptions, afterwards, on inward sentiments of evidence, as they are called, instead of clear and real ideas, lays aside, at once, the only sure guides to knowledge. No wonder then if he wanders from it. This Des Cartes did very widely in his construction of a world, and yet by dint of genius he gave a great air of simplicity and plausibility to his hypothesis, and he knew how to make even geometry subservient to error. It proved in other hands, indeed, the instrument of detecting his errors, and of establishing truer principles of natural philosophy. He furnished to others arms against himself, among the rest to our Newton; for though the system of the latter be no more owing to the hypothesis of the former, than that of Copernicus to that of Ptolemy, yet was it the application of geometry to physics, that enabled the British philosopher to make so many admirable discoveries: and the introduction of geometry into physics must be acknowledged due to the French philosopher. To conclude, by bringing this example to our purpose. The plenum of Des Cartes is well nigh destroyed; many of his laws of motion are shown to be false; the mills that served to grind his three elements are demolished: and his fluid matter in which, as in a torrent, the planets were carried round the sun, whilst a similar motion in the particular vortex of every planet impelled all bodies to the centre, is vanished. Notwithstanding all this, how slowly, how unwillingly have many philosophers departed from the Cartesian hypothesis? They have had recourse to the most forced suppositions to defend it; and when it has been demonstrated false in one of the principal parts, in that of his fluid matter, whose rapid circulation he supposes to cause the fall of bodies, and the motion of the planets, and which he invented to explain these phenomena, we shall be told very gravely, that some fluid matter or other may, however, in some manner or other, be the cause of these phenomena. It is even ridiculous to observe the same men tenacious of a hypothesis neither deduced from the phenomena, nor consistent with them, and averse to receive, or at best extremely scrupulous about receiving, a sys-

tem built on observation and experiment, not on assumption, and which all the phenomena conspire to establish.

If philosophers meant nothing more than the discovery of truth, they would confine themselves to those rules by which alone, and to those bounds of inquiry within which alone, we are able to discover it. But a predominant principle of vanity makes them break these rules, and pass these bounds. Not content with philosophical liberty, they affect to proceed licentiously: and it is this affectation that makes them so fond of hypotheses, by the means of which, how imperfect soever their knowledge is, their pretended systems are still complete. Thus it has happened that natural philosophers have filled their works with fictions, and, like lying travellers, have given descriptions of countries through which they never passed. They have done even more, they have affected to reveal the secrets of courts they never saw. This I mean; they have not only supposed existences that never existed, but have presumed themselves able to give a sufficient reason for every thing that does exist. Leibnitz, who had much knowledge and some sagacity, but too much pretended subtilty and real presumption, imposed this obligation on philosophers, the obligation of adulterating physics with metaphysics. Thus for instance, he thought himself obliged to give a sufficient reason how, and why the extension of body, or body according to the Cartesians, becomes possible; for though actuality may, he denied that possibility could, proceed from the will of God. He found this reason neither in sensible extension, nor in the insensible atoms that compose body. But he found it happily in his Monades, that is in simple, unextended beings, that are the only substances, and that compose all extension, which God could not have created if he had not created them first. Is it worth while to acquire the name of a great philosopher, at the expense of amusing mankind with such hypothetical extravagances? Surely not.

Since I have ventured to censure Des Cartes on this head, on which he was very liable to censure, I think myself obliged to justify him on another, on which he has been accused very unjustly. Strato might be an atheist, for what I know, though mention is made, in the catalogue of his works preserved by Diogenes Laertius, of three books that he wrote concerning the gods. But the passage in the academics of Tully, where it is said, that he did not employ the gods in making the world "negat operâ deorum se uti ad fabricandum mundum," will not persuade me that he was so. Nothing can be more consistent than to acknowledge a Supreme Being, the source of all existence, the first efficient cause of all things, and to account for the phenomena by physical and mechanical causes, by matter and motion.

This Des Cartes therefore endeavored, and might endeavor to do without forfeiting the character of a good theist. Philosophers might very reasonably object to his hypothesis, but divines had the less reason to do so; because, besides proving the existence of the self-existent Being by an argument which he thought good, and which has been urged as decisive by Malebranche and others, the very foundation of his doctrine rests on these principles, that God created matter and that he impressed two motions on the parts of it. But my Lord Bacon, a much better apologist than I am, had obviated the objection made to Des Cartes long before this philosopher had written, in the third book of the augmentation of science: and the passage is so considerable, that I will dwell, with your leave, a little upon it.

This great author then was so desirous to keep metaphysicians in countenance, by keeping metaphysics in the rank of sciences, that he resolved at any rate to give them an object. As such he assigned the doctrine of formal causes: and indeed if he had admitted the forms of Plato, forms entirely abstracted from matter, these would have been imaginary objects in his scheme of some science more sublime than physics. But these he rejects deservedly, as theological speculations that infected and corrupted the whole of Plato's natural philosophy: so that he left himself no forms to establish as objects of metaphysics, but such as must be discovered, if they are to be discovered, by physics; which he himself admits in effect, when he says, that we may discover them if we turn our eyes to action and use; that is, to the action and use of substances, whose forms are the species of things; and which he confirms, I think, by the examples he brings to explain this inexplicable doctrine, or rather unattainable science. In default of this, that the learned chancellor might provide some object for metaphysics, he established the inquisition, or research of final causes as a second. He should not be much concerned, he says, if the order of this research, that he would place among metaphysics, and that has been placed usually among physics, were alone concerned. Now here I venture with fear and trembling, but I must venture, for the love of truth pushes me on, to differ from this great man. The order according to which the doctrine of final causes is confined to the known physical province, instead of being translated to a metaphysical region, appears to me not only useful, but necessary to be preserved, as well to advance real knowledge, as to prevent error, both philosophical and theological. The more we proceed in the study of nature, under the conduct of experimental philosophy, the more discoveries we make and shall make of the infinite wisdom as well as power of its author. The structure of the parts, the design and harmony of the whole, will be matter of perpetual

astonishment, and ought to be a motive to the most devout adoration of that Supreme, and incomprehensible Being, of God the maker and the preserver of the universe. I said the harmony and design, as well as the structure; for besides the admirable contrivance which appears in the bare structure of all the bodies, animal bodies especially, that surround us, as well as of our own, when we contemplate them without any regard to their distinction, wants, or uses, there appears something still more admirable when we contemplate them in these respects. Sometimes we can discover neither efficient, nor final cause; sometimes, but more rarely, both. Sometimes we discover the former, and the latter escapes our inquiry. Sometimes again the final cause is more obvious than the efficient, as in one of the instances brought by my Lord Bacon; for surely this final cause, that eyelashes were given to shadow and defend the eye, is much more evident than the efficient cause he assigns, or any other, perhaps, that can be assigned. But in all cases where such discoveries are made really, they are made by physical researches. When we proceed in the investigation of them by the help of experimental philosophy, we put ourselves under the conduct of God, who leads us by the knowledge of his works to the knowledge of himself. But when we abandon this method, and pretend by the strength of our intellect to arrive at superior science, we put ourselves under the conduct of imagination, the worst guide a philosopher can choose, and never so seducing, nor so dangerous as in the brightest genius. This remark is abundantly confirmed in general by the experience of all ages.*

* It comes into my thoughts to mention, upon this occasion, another opinion, which casts a ridicule on all religion. If we are able to collect any truth from our observations on the mundane system, besides that of a self-existent and intelligent first cause of all things, it is that of final causes.—The certainty we have of these makes part of the demonstration of the other, and is the sublimest and most important speculation in which natural philosophy can terminate. I say terminate, because the absurdity of those philosophers, who, in the course of their inquiries, assigned final instead of physical causes, has been already exposed. The abuse which those who profess theology in all religions make of final causes is of another kind, and may serve as a further example of the fantastical and profane notions which men assume hypothetically, when they carry their reasonings about spirit and spiritual things, without regard to what experience might teach them, up to the divine nature and economy.

Mankind, in general, esteem their species to be the final cause of the whole creation, and each society or sect of men is instructed to esteem itself a principal, if not the sole, object of Providence. On this foundation even they, who never observed, perhaps, any of the numberless and astonishing instances of order, contrivance and design, which are obvious in the constitution of things, ascribe, and instruct others to ascribe, every event that is produced, in the ordinary course of nature, to extraordinary interpositions of God's imme-

For these reasons which might be greatly extended and enforced, I cannot subscribe to the partition of science which our famous chancellor makes on this occasion. They, who have no pretensions to be esteemed natural philosophers, profit in their several professions of the discoveries which these philosophers make about efficient causes. Just so divines, or they who call themselves metaphysicians, may profit of those which the same philosophers make about final causes: and when they do so in such a manner as to create, and maintain in the minds of men, a due awe and reverence of the Supreme Being, these discoveries will be productive of the best, and noblest effects; far from being barren like virgins consecrated to God, as the chancellor expresses himself, rather prettily than truly. "Causarum finalium inquisitio sterilis est, et tanquam virgo Deo consecrata nil parit." But still there will be as little reason to advance, that the investigation of final causes is a part of metaphysics, or of theology, as there is to say, that the investigation of efficient causes is the object of every profession wherein some knowledge concerning them is employed.

diate and particular providence, just as they may be strained to suit prejudice, interest, vanity, and passion. I need not bring examples in proof. They will occur to you fast enough, to show how a doctrine, that should increase our admiration of God's infinite wisdom and power, and enliven all the acts of adoration that we direct to this incomprehensible Being, plunges men by the abuse they make, and a wrong application of it, into error and superstition. It is error proportioned to the comprehension of every mind, and to the vanity of every heart. It prevails, therefore, easily, and spreads from the highest down to the lowest ranks of men. If the ridiculous question, which Seneca puts in his book concerning providence, "nunquid hoc quoque à Deo aliquis exigit, ut bonorum virorum etiam sarcinas servat?" had been put to your parish clerk, he would have answered, I doubt not, with much holy assurance, in the affirmative, and would have inserted, among his anecdotes, some special examples of wallets, and bundles providentially saved, or recovered. The Stoics are ridiculed, in Tully's academical questions, for having low notions of the Divinity, and such as supposed among the gods a worker like Myrmecides, who was famous in his time, as well as one Callicrates, for making bees, and flies, and ants, and other small insects in ivory. The joke was unjustly applied, as far as it was applied to this general position, that nothing could be without God, "cupis quidem vos majestatem deducitis," says the academician, "usque ad apium, formicarumque perfectionem: ut etiam inter deos Myrmecides aliquis minutorum opusculorum fabricator fuisse videatur." This joke on the Stoics was unphilosophical and silly. But what advantage would this academician have taken over them, if he could have laid to their charge, not only that they made God the immediate author of the least, as well as of the greatest productions in nature, but that they made him the efficient cause of every immoral sentiment and action? He would have had then a large field, indeed, wherein to exult, "in quo possit exultare oratio." But the Stoics, as absurd and as superstitious as many of their opinions were, gave him no such advantage. He must have waited till our age, to have had such à monstrous opinion as this to combat among the professors of theism.

Now, though I cannot subscribe to this partition of science, nor think the order in which the research of final causes is placed at all indifferent, yet I subscribe most readily to all that is said in the same place against those who substitute final in lieu of efficient causes. Both are objects, but distinct objects of physics, and nothing can tempt men to confound them but a sort of laziness and vanity. By one they are led to decline some trouble, and by the other to hope to conceal their ignorance. We shall not be at all uncharitable, in assigning such motives to the two philosophers, who have distinguished themselves by this proceeding, in which they have been followed, as in other absurdities, by numbers. Plato had a luxuriant imagination, and a great flow of words. It cost him, therefore, much less to invent final causes, and to expatiate theologically upon them, than it would have done to pursue the discovery of efficient causes by the slow and painful course of experiments. Aristotle had great subtilty of genius, and the same ambition that made him think, like an Ottoman prince, to use my Lord Bacon's simile, that he could not reign securely, unless he put all his brethren to death, made him think too, that he ought at any rate to maintain his pretensions to universal knowledge. For this purpose he perplexed what he could not explain, and in the instance before us he discoursed logically about final causes, to conceal his ignorance of the efficient. I should be unwilling to warrant any fact on the authority of Justin Martyr, on whom the idlest tales were able to impose; but the bare report that ran in Greece concerning the death of this philosopher, who was said to have drowned himself in the Negropontic current, for shame that he had not discovered the cause of it, may serve to show, that the character he has at this day, is that which he had in his own age and country. Upon the whole, it may very well be, that Democritus and others, whether atheists, or theists, who gave, or seemed to give no place to God, nor intelligence, in the production of the phenomena, nor made any mention by consequence of final causes, but applied themselves wholly to the discovery of material efficient causes, might penetrate, for that very reason, deeper into natural philosophy than they could have done, if they had recurred often to the wisdom and power of God, like Plato, to those of nature like Aristotle, and to final causes like both. This might be, and my Lord Bacon who thinks so, and who approved this method of pursuing the study of physics, prepared, therefore, an apology for Des Cartes, long before this philosopher wanted it.

There is a passage in Plato which I shall have occasion to quote, in another place, and to another purpose, where Socrates, after reading a treatise of natural philosophy which Anaxagoras had written, sneers at him, and complains, that he who ascribed the

structure of the universe to a supreme mind, labored so much in the explanation of material, instead of discoursing about final causes. This passage would prove beyond dispute, if any proof was wanting, that Plato introduced, or supported at least by the authority of Socrates, the absurd custom of substituting final intentional causes in the place of mechanical and material; and that philosophers, who were as good theists as himself, though they did not affect so much theology, pursued the study of nature in the same method as the materialists, though they asserted an intelligent first Cause, which the others denied.

The truth is, that neither these philosophers, nor even the others could proceed in the investigation of material causes, without discovering sometimes the intentional, final causes of things; because the latter are often, though not always, so plainly pointed out by the former, that he who does not see them must shut his eyes on purpose. When they are not thus plainly pointed out, it is vain presumption to pretend to account for them: and Socrates would have had no reason to complain, if a naturalist, a stranger to Athens, looking at him in his prison, and seeing him fettered and chained, had shown how it came to pass that he could not walk, and that he could sit, without presuming to determine why he was there.

To conclude and wind up this section; there is no study, after that of morality, which deserves the application of the human mind, so much as that of natural philosophy, and of the arts and sciences which serve to promote it. The will of God, in the constitution of our moral system, is the object of one. His infinite wisdom and power, that are manifested in the natural system of the universe, are the object of the other. One is the immediate concern of every man, and lies therefore within the reach of every man. The other does so too, as far as our immediate wants require, and far enough to excite awe and veneration of a Supreme Being in every attentive mind. But further than this, a knowledge of physical nature is not the immediate and necessary concern of every man; and therefore a further inquiry into it becomes the labor of a few, though the fruits of this inquiry be to the advantage of many. Discoveries of use in human life have been sometimes made; but these fruits in general consist chiefly in the gratification of curiosity. Their acquisition, therefore, is painful: and when all that can be gathered are gathered, the crop will be small. Should the human species exist a thousand generations more, and the study of nature be carried on through all of them with the same application, a little more particular knowledge of the apparent properties of matter, and of the sensible principles and laws of motion might be acquired: more phenomena might be discovered, and a few more of those links, perhaps, which

compose the great immeasurable chain of causes and effects that descends from the throne of God. But human sense, which can alone furnish the materials of this knowledge, continuing the same, the want of ideas, the want of adequate ideas would make it to the last impracticable to penetrate into the great secrets of nature, the real essences of substances, and the primary causes of their action, their passion, and all their operations; so that mankind would cease to be, without having acquired a complete and real knowledge of the world they inhabited, and of the bodies they wore in it.

SECTION IV.

Having now said all that occurs to me at present, concerning our complex ideas of substances, whose archetypes are without us; I proceed to take some further notice than has been yet taken by me, of our other complex ideas and notions which are said to have their archetypes within us, and which may be said, I think, more properly in the same sense to be archetypes themselves. Nor is this the sole difference, by which they are distinguished from the former. Those of substances are received by the mind in its passive, these are framed by the mind in its active state. They are framed by the mind as the mind has need of them, and therefore on no subjects so much as on those that regard the thoughts, the opinions, the affections, the passions, and the actions of mankind. The archetypes of our ideas of substances exist whether our minds perceive them or not. These being archetypes themselves, and having no existence out of the mind, have no permanent existence any where, not even in the mind; for there they exist no longer than whilst they are the immediate objects of thought. They cease to exist, when they cease to be perceived. But the mind, having once made them, can recall them into being, and employ them to facilitate the acquisition and communication of knowledge. It is true indeed, and it has been observed already, that nature seems to obtrude, or obtrudes even the complex ideas of modes and relation upon us, as well as those of substances. But still there is a plain difference between the two cases, which must be a little more and more precisely developed, than it has been in the second section. Both are lessons, but different lessons of nature. Sense alone is immediately concerned in one, whether we receive by it the first impressions of outward objects, or whether we correct, and determine the ideas these impressions have given us. But intellect is immediately and principally concerned in the other. Intellect serves in the use and application of ideas acquired by sense, but has no share in framing them. Intellect

on the other hand has always an immediate, and principal share, and is sometimes alone employed, in framing our complex ideas and notions of modes and relations. Thus, for instance, to mention a simple as well as a mixed mode; when we observe certain terminations of finite extension, or certain proceedings of men to men, the lesson of nature does not consist in this, that these are patterns by which, and according to which the ideas, or notions we speak of, are framed, without any share taken by the mind except that of perception; but it consists rather in giving hints, if I may say so, which are vague, and neither determined, nor classed, like our ideas of substances; and the mind, taking these hints, frames by the exercise of its discerning, compounding, and comparing faculties, these ideas or notions. The terminations of extension, that are seen by us, produce ideas, no doubt; but I choose on this occasion to design them as hints, because they do not so much give, as suggest the ideas which the mind frames by considering these terminations of the extrême parts of extension both distinctly, and relatively. Confused appearances of this sort strike the senses, but the ideas of particular figures, as well as the general notion of figure, may be framed independently of these sensations by the mind. In like manner, an action which we see performed, as in the case of killing mentioned above, gives an idea, no doubt; but this idea, in the respect in which it is considered here, is nothing more than a hint to the mind, that passes from a bare perception of the action to contemplate all the circumstances of it, and all the relations both of the action, and of the actors, and so frames by reflection, without the concurrence of sensation, ideas and notions of another kind, both particular and general. This is the great intellectual province, wherein our minds range with much freedom, and often with exorbitant license, in the pursuit of real, or imaginary science. We add ideas to ideas, and notions to notions, and by considering the habitudes and relations of all these, we acquire at length such a multitude as astonishes the mind itself, and is both for number and variety inconceivable.

When we take such a general view of human knowledge, and represent to ourselves all the objects that our minds pursue, and in the pursuit whereof we pretend not only to reason on less or greater grounds of probability, but most commonly to demonstrate, we are apt to entertain a high opinion, and to make extravagant encomiums of our intellect. But when we enter into a serious and impartial detail concerning this knowledge, and analyse carefully, what the great pretenders to it have given and give us daily for knowledge, we shall be obliged to confess, that the human intellect is rather a rank than a fertile soil, barren without due culture, and apt to shoot up tares and weeds with

too much. By such combinations of ideas as I have been mentioning, we shorten and facilitate the operations of our minds, as well as the communication of our thoughts. Our knowledge becomes general, and our intellect seems to be less dependent on sense. From which observations philosophers have entertained false notions of what they call pure intellect, and have flattered themselves that they could extend their knowledge, by the power the mind exercises in framing complex ideas and notions, very far beyond the narrow bounds to which it is limited by simple ideas, over which the mind has not the least original power, and which must, therefore, let the mind compose, combine, and abstract them as it pleases (for it cannot make any), determine the extent of our complex ideas and notions.

But, besides the limitations imposed on the mind by the human constitution, there is another which we ourselves must impose on it, if we desire to combine our ideas and our notions so as to obtain, by their means, real and useful knowledge. It is the more necessary to insist on this limitation, because philosophers have not only neglected it too much in practice, but endeavored to establish opinions inconsistent with it. Observe the chain of these opinions. The human mind is a participation of the divine mind, or an emanation from it, or something very analogous to it. The essences of things do not depend on God; for if they did, things might be possible and impossible at the same time according to his will, which implies contradiction. The divine intelligence is the scene of all things possible: but though the divine will be the source of actuality, it is not so of possibility. Possibility and impossibility are fixed natures, independent on God. The knowledge of things possible, independently of their existence, is absolute knowledge. The knowledge of things actual, in consequence of their existence, is relative knowledge. The human mind is capable of both. Philosophers may, therefore, contemplate the intelligible natures, the fixed and unalterable essences of things, whether the will of God determines them to actual existence or not. Philosophers may reason therefore not only from their own system, that of actuality; but from God's, that of possibility. These opinions, some of which are nearly true, others of which are absolutely false, and all of which are liable to much abuse, have been advanced: and these, and others of the same kind, are the necessary foundations of the most sublime metaphysics. Let us descend from such imaginary heights; place ourselves on the human level, and consider from thence what this part of human knowledge is, concerning which we are now to speak, and from whence, and how it arises.

It has been observed, in speaking of that part of natural philosophy which contemplates substances, that we must never lose

sight of experience, if we aim at acquiring real knowledge.—But we may go further, on as good grounds, and affirm, that the same rule must be followed in that other part of natural philosophy (for such it is if it be any thing) which contemplates mind; and in all our general, or abstract reasonings about moral, or other matters. I am far from saying that we should not reason about things possible, as well as things actual, or that we should exclude every thing hypothetical out of our reasonings. I know too well, that probability is our lot oftener than certainty. But this I say, that we should never reason about the first, except under the direction of the last, and much less in contradiction to the last. God's knowledge precedes all existence. All existence proceeds from his knowledge and his will. He made things actual, because he knew them, and why should I not say because he made them possible? But we poor creatures should not be able to guess at things possible, if we did not take our rise from things actual. Human knowledge is so entirely and solely derived from actual being, that without actual being, we should not have even one of those simple ideas whereof all the complex ideas and abstract notions that turn our heads are composed. These complex ideas and abstract notions, to be materials of general and real knowledge, must have a conformity with existence. They must be true, not in an idle metaphysical sense, that they are really what they are; but in this sense, that they are true representations of actual, or of such possible existence, as experience leaves us no room to doubt may become actual.

That this is agreeable to the common sense of mankind undebauched with philosophy or superstition, the universal practice of mankind may serve to convince us. The human mind is able to frame many complex ideas and abstract notions, to which no names have been assigned in any language, because they have not been brought into use among any people. Many other complex ideas and abstract notions have names assigned to them in one language, and are in use among one people, and have no such names, nor are in any such use among another. What shall we say is the reason of such obvious matters of fact? The reason appears to me to be plainly this. Men are determined to frame these complex ideas, and abstract notions, by the want they have of them, and the want they have of them arises from hence, that they observe certain combinations of beings, of actions, of modes and relations to exist, relatively to which they could neither think, discourse, nor act, all which it is often either their inclination, their interest, or their duty to do, unless they applied their minds to the framing of such ideas and notions. Men form, therefore, no where, complex ideas and notions of combinations of this kind, which they have observed to exist no

where as in the first case. Nor do they form them always where such combinations do exist; though they are not enough observed to have the want of these ideas and notions perceived, as in the second case. These ideas and notions are so necessary to the improvement of knowledge, that as we proceed in acquiring, and communicating it by the employment of some, so the knowledge we acquire makes it necessary in every step we advance to frame, and to employ more, that we may proceed further.

It is reasonable to believe that the first of men had framed no ideas, nor notions of jealousy, envy, anger, malice, treachery, and murder in Paradise, nor perhaps out of it, before Cain slew Abel. Then, no doubt, he framed all these, and those of assassination and fratricide besides, and invented words to signify them, as he had invented names for all the beasts of the field and fowls of the air, when they passed in review before him. Since the days of Adam, and his unhappy fall, as the number, and the iniquity of his posterity increased, so has their experience: and therefore legislators, and the founders of commonwealths, and all those who have civilised and instructed mankind, have been careful to observe the behavior, and the dealings of men with one another in the same, and in different societies. They have remarked the circumstances, and the consequences of every action relatively to the happiness and unhappiness of mankind. Those of one sort have been termed virtues, those of the other vices: and as these virtues and vices have arisen, and have offered themselves to observation, the same persons, political and moral philosophers, have proceeded in determining complex ideas or notions of them, and in marking the several combinations by distinct names, in order to promote the practice of virtue, and to restrain vice by improving the natural sanctions of rewards and punishments.

Thus then the principles of the law of nature, and of civil jurisprudence have been collected *à posteriori*, by experience and observation: and the same method should be taken in every part of philosophy, though I have insisted particularly on this alone. We should not suffer, much less encourage, imagination to rove in the search of truth. To know things as they are, is to know truth: to know them as they may be, is to guess at truth. Judgment and observation guide to one, imagination and speculation to the other. To know them as they are, the mind must be constantly intent to frame its ideas and notions after that great original, nature; for though these ideas and notions are properly and usefully framed by the mind, that they may serve as archetypes by which we reason, and according to which we judge, yet must all the parts of them be taken from nature, and no otherwise put together than nature warrants. As well may

the painter copy the features of a face on which he never looks, by pure guess, as the philosopher frame his ideas and notions of nature, physical and moral, by pure intellect. One may draw a metaphysical man, and the other invent a metaphysical hypothesis. But the features of the picture, and the ideas and notions of the system being taken from imaginary not real existence, the picture will be the picture of nobody, and the system the system of nothing. Nay, there is still a worse consequence that follows often, because it is almost unavoidable. Imagination submitted to judgment will never go beyond knowledge founded on experience, or high probability immediately deducible from it. But when imaginations naturally warm, and excited by a strong desire of being distinguished, break loose from this control, though the possible man, and the possible system may be so composed as to contain nothing absolutely impossible, yet they may contain something monstrous, like those productions wherein nature deviates from her regular course. Whenever this happens, and it has often happened in philosophy, it must not be deemed a jot less absurd to take these ideas and notions for real archetypes, or the system they compose for a system of real knowledge, than it would be to take such monstrous productions for the archetypes of any species.

This proceeding is the more dangerous, because we may accustom our minds to contemplate chimeras till they grow familiar to us, and pass for realities. After which we shall not fail to reason from them, and to control even what is, by what imagination has told us may be. The very reverse should be our practice. All that we imagine may be, should be compared over and over with the things that are: and till such a comparison and analysis has been well and sufficiently made, all argumentation is impertinent. We can frame ideas of a centaur, or a hippogryph. No contradiction is implied by ranking them among possible beings. We can show wherein these complex ideas agree and disagree. We can reason, frame propositions, affirm, and deny concerning them; but yet every man who is not out of his senses will confess, I suppose, that these ideas are fantastical, and that it is, therefore, absurd to reason about them. They are fantastical because their supposed archetypes do not exist. The reasoning about them is absurd, because it is absurd to reason about substances that are not actual, though they may be possible.

But I ask, is it a jot less absurd to frame ideas, and notions, of mixed modes and relations, any otherwise than experience shows us that nature warrants to do? Mr. Locke has observed truly, that "mixed modes are made for the most part out of the simple ideas of thinking, and motion, wherein all action is comprehended,

and out of that of power from whence we conceive all action to proceed." Now if this be so, is it not evident that mixed modes, how much soever mixed, are resolvable, and should be analysed, into ideas less complex, and these ultimately into simple ideas? Is it not evident that whether we consider intellectual, or corporeal agency, whether we frame mixed modes of powers as modifications of thought and motion, or whether we consider them only for want of being able to do more, in the actions they produce, is it not evident that we must have recourse on all these occasions to existence, existence of powers, and actions, or of actions at least?

The example of power and action, which I employ in speaking of mixed modes, is equally applicable to the case of relations, among which that of cause and effect is one of the most considerable, as it is the relation concerning which the mind of man is the most curious to acquire knowledge. All our ideas of relation are framed by the comparison the mind makes of one idea with another: as these ideas therefore are fantastical, or real, so our ideas of their relations, how justly soever the mind makes the comparison, are in effect fantastical, or real too. The comparison therefore must be not only that of ideas with ideas, but that of ideas with the objects of them, with things. This recourse to existence is so truly the only sure rule by which we can frame our ideas in such a manner as to make them proper materials of real human knowledge at least, that it is, I suppose, a mistake most commonly when we are thought to frame fantastical ideas of relations, by a wrong comparison of real ideas. I suppose we shall find on such occasions, if we observe closely, that the fantastical idea of relation does not arise so much from a wrong comparison of real ideas which the mind contemplates, as from a voluntary or involuntary corruption of the reality of these supposed real ideas.

I say voluntary, or involuntary, because philosophers are apt to make complex ideas and notions of all kinds, not only wantonly, but unfairly. These ideas and notions should be composed in order to assist the mind in forming opinions, or acquiring knowledge. But it is obvious to observation, that men begin very often by forming strange opinions, or by taking them on trust; and afterwards put together inconsistent, and inadequate ideas, which they suppose to be both consistent, and adequate, in order to frame such ideas of mixed modes and relations, as may help them to impose, or defend their opinions with some appearance of plausibility. The mind wanders easily; and is easily, more easily led into error about modes and relations, than about substances: and error about the former, may be concealed better, and defended more plausibly by metaphysical chicane,

than about the latter. Let us keep our minds, therefore, constantly intent on those criterions which our physical and moral systems hold out to us: and if by surprise, inadvertency, or prepossession we have been led too far from them, let us return to them as to the oracles of truth. For want of doing one or the other, into what extravagant opinions, under the specious names of metaphysical, or theological science, have not men been carried? You give us philosophy in a poetical dress? You adorn, but do not disguise, and much less corrupt the truth. There are who have given us mere poetry in a philosophical dress: and, I think, you must admit that Plato, Malebranche, and a good friend of ours, to instance in none of inferior note, are as truly poets as Homer and you. In a word, the boasted power of framing complex ideas, and abstract notions, will be found, as it is exercised, to be so far from showing the great force and extent of human intellect, and from raising man up to divinity, that it will show, on the contrary, how weak and how confined this intellect is, and sink him down, if you will allow me such an expression, into that animality above which he affects so vainly to rise.

This now, whereof we have taken some view in several of its branches, is that noble fund of ideas from whence all our intellectual riches are derived. The mind of man does often what princes and states have done. It gives a currency to brass and copper coined in the several philosophical and theological mints, and raises the value of gold and silver above that of their true standard. But the success of this expedient is much alike in both cases. In different sects, as in different states, the imposition passes; but none are the richer for it.

One great advantage that has been reaped since the resurrection of letters, and since the improvements of modern philosophy in the study of nature intellectual and corporeal, has been this, that men have discerned their ignorance better than they did in the days of ignorance, and that they have discovered more and more of it, as they have advanced in knowledge. A great part of this discovery is that of the limitation as well as imperfection of our simple and complex ideas and notions. Limited and imperfect they are, no doubt, and yet it would be well for us if they had no other defect. Another, and, on many occasions, a greater belongs to them; for, even in the narrow compass to which they extend, they are apt to fluctuate and vary: so that besides the difficulty of determining them well, there is that of preserving the determination of them steadily in our minds. He, who is attentive to do so, must acknowledge the difficulty he finds of this sort even in his private meditations. But the difficulty increases vastly when he is to communicate these ideas and

notions in discourse or writing, and above all if he is obliged to enter the lists of disputation.

Our complex ideas being assemblages of simple ideas, that have often no other connection except that which the mind gives them, we might be easily led to conceive the difficulty of this task by a bare reflection on the weakness of memory, and if I may say so, on the seeming caprice of this faculty, before we were made sensible of it by repeated experiences. The ideas that are lodged there begin to fade almost as soon as they are framed. They are continually slipping from us, or shifting their forms; and if the objects that excited some did not often renew them, and if we had not a power to recall others before they are gone too far out of the mind, we should lose our simple, and much more our complex ideas, and all our notions would become confused and obscure. The mind would be little more than a channel through which ideas and notions glided from entity into nonentity. But our case is not so bad. They are often renewed, and we can recall them as often as we please. There is, however, a difference between the renewing of them, and the recalling of them. When ideas are renewed by the same objects that excited them first in the mind, they are renewed such as they were. The light and heat of the sun will cause the same sensations, and stronger perhaps of the same kind, in the man who has not seen one nor felt the other in many years, than they caused in him formerly. Just so any operation, or affection of the mind, which has been long unperceived, will appear the same it used to appear to our inward sense, when it is perceived anew by reflection. But when we are forced to recall our complex ideas, the case is not the same, at least when they are such as are not in common use. Those of mixed modes and relations, for instance, that philosophers sometimes employ, and to which the mind scarce ever adverts on other occasions, may well receive some alteration even when they are recalled readily, though this alteration is the less perceptible, perhaps, on account of that very readiness with which they are recalled. But when they are recalled with difficulty, and dragged back slowly, as it were, and by pieces and parcels into the mind, it is no wonder if they receive much greater alteration. They are then in some sort recompounded, and though this may be for the better as well as for the worse, yet still they vary, and every variation of them begets some uncertainty and confusion in our reasoning. Thus it must be, when, besides our simple ideas, such numberless collections of simple and complex ideas, and such numberless combinations of all these into notions, are to be held together and to be preserved in their order by so weak a mental faculty as that of retention.

Names indeed are given to signify all our ideas and all our notions to ourselves and to others, and to help the memory in meditation as well as in discourse. When they are assigned to complex ideas, they are meant as knots according to the very proper image Mr. Locke gives of them, to tie each specific bundle of ideas together: and in these respects they are not only useful, but necessary. It happens, however, that names, far from having these effects, have such very often as are quite contrary to these. Whilst we retain the names of complex ideas and notions, we imagine that we retain the ideas and notions; but the ideas and notions shift and vary, whilst the names remain the same. The scene of the mind, like a moving picture, must be governed with attention, that it may bring into our view the images we want, and as we want them. Otherwise ideas that are foreign to our actual train of thinking will frequently rush into our thoughts, and become objects of them whether we will or no. But there is another and a greater mischief which will flow from this constitution of the mind, unless the utmost attention be employed, and often when it is. The former is a sort of violence, which cannot be offered unperceived, and may be therefore resisted. This that I am going to mention steals so silently upon us, that we do not perceive it very often even when it has worked its effect. When we recall our ideas and notions, whether this be done with ease or difficulty, we review them in some sort: and if they are more liable to have been altered, we have a better chance for perceiving any alteration that may have been made in the determination of them. But when the ideas and notions we want present themselves, as it were of themselves, to the mind, under their usual names and appearances, we are apt to employ them without examination, and perhaps we advert very often to nothing more than the word by which we are used to signify them. In this manner our ideas and notions become unsteady imperceptibly, and I would not answer that something may not happen to me of this kind, even in writing this essay, though I am on my guard against it. How much more must it happen to those who are not thus on their guard?

Every man imagines that his ideas and notions are his own in every sense, but every man almost deceives himself in this case. When we learn the names of complex ideas and notions, we should accustom the mind to decompound them, as I believe it has been observed already, that we may verify these, and so make them our own, as well as learn to compound others. But very few are at this trouble, and the general turn of education is contrived to keep men from taking it. Bred to think as well as speak by rote, they furnish their minds, as they furnish their houses or clothe their bodies, with the fancies of other men, and

according to the mode of the age and country. They pick up their ideas and notions in common conversation, or in their schools. The first are always superficial, and both are commonly false. These are defects in the first determination of our ideas and notions, and if we join to these the obstinacy and negligence that become habitual in most men, we shall find no reason to be surprised that absurd opinions are tenaciously embraced, and wildly and inconsistently defended. Uniformity of ideas in error would have, at least, this advantage: error would be more easily detected and more effectually exploded.

But supposing the contrary of all this, supposing our ideas and notions to have been determined truly, and preserved steadily, we must not flatter ourselves, that we are quite secure against the evil consequence that is observed in this place to flow from the imperfect constitution of the human mind. The very temper of the mind, a little too much remissness, or a little too much agitation, affections that are grown up, or passions that are inflamed, may occasion some alteration in our ideas and notions, in the very moment that we employ them. If it be small, it will be unperceived by us. If it be great, the affection or passion that caused it will excuse it, perhaps justify it to us. But however small and almost imperceptible, even to a cool mind that is on its guard against its own weakness, such alterations may be, each in itself; yet, besides that, each of them may produce others, each of them, though small in the idea, or notion, may become of great consequence in the course of that reasoning, wherein this idea or notion is frequently employed, or which turns perhaps upon it. A few ideas, or parts of ideas, that slip out of the bundle of covetousness, make it the bundle of frugality: and a few, added to that of frugality, make it the bundle of covetousness.

Thus it happens when we discourse with ourselves. But when we discourse with others, the difficulty doubles; for besides that of maintaining a steady determination of our own ideas and notions, we have the additional difficulty very often of communicating, and always of maintaining the same steady determination in those of another. This is our case; that of every one in his turn, not only when mixed modes and relations, but in some degree, even when substances are our objects; and I persuade myself that you have been more than once ready to laugh or cry, in the midst of several rational creatures, who talked of things quite different, called them by the same names, and imagined that they talked of the same things. The choirs of birds who whistle and sing, or scream at one another, or the herds of beasts who bleat and low, or chatter and roar at one another, have just as much meaning, and communicate it just as well.

At least I presume so, for I can affirm of no species but my own. All of them seem to have ideas, and these seem often to be better determined in the birds and beast, than in men. All of them seem to have, in these loud conversations, some general meaning. But none of them seem to have that precision, order, and connection of ideas and notions, which alone can make up rational discourse.

Such is the common conversation, such the ordinary correspondence of men with one another. Such too for the most part are all the public discourses that are held, and the solemn harangues of the pulpit. But the matter grows still worse when any controversy is concerned. Though truth be one, and every necessary truth be obvious enough, yet that there must be various opinions about it among creatures constituted as we are, is as certain as that there are such opinions. Truth however is seldom the object, as reason is seldom the guide; but every man's pride, and every man's interest requires that both should be thought to be on his side. From hence all those disputes, both public and private, which render the state of society a state of warfare, the warfare of tongues, pens and swords. In that of the two first, with which alone we have to do here, disputes become contests for superiority between man and man, and party and party, instead of being what they should be, comparisons of opinions, of facts and reasons; by which means each side goes off with triumph, and every dispute is a drawn battle. This is the ordinary course of controversy, not among the vulgar alone, but among sage philosophers and pious divines, whose conduct is not more edifying than that of the vulgar. Will it be pretended that the schools of religion and learning have, in this respect, any advantage over other public assemblies, over coffee-houses and taverns? If it is, we may safely deny it; because we can easily prove the contrary. In vain will it be urged, that men who have much learning, and who are accustomed to investigate, and to fix the most abstruse and momentous truths, must of course, and even without superior parts, be better able nicely to discern, to determine, and to compare and to connect ideas and notions, than those who neither possess the same learning and the same habits, nor have the same art of reasoning. This may be in some respects true, but upon the whole it is not so: and a plain man would overwhelm the scholar who should hold this language, by showing, in numerous instances, the weakness of the human mind, that of this very scholar perhaps in some; the narrow confines, and in them the instability of our ideas and notions, the impertinence of logic, the futility of metaphysics, the blasphemy of divinity, and the fraud of disputation.

The best, and even such as pass for the fairest controversial writers, improve by artifice the natural infirmity of the human mind, and do on purpose what is here lamented as an evil not always to be avoided. They confound ideas, and perplex the significations of their signs, so as may serve best the intention, not of discovering truth, but of having the last word in the dispute. This practice is so common, and especially where favorite interests, and on their accounts favorite tenets, are concerned, that I think no writings of this sort can be produced, wherein it is not employed, more or less, on both sides. How indeed should it be otherwise, when skill in disputation is esteemed a great part of learning, and the most scandalous frauds are applauded under the name of subtilty? Whatever excites men to it, whether pride, or self-interest, or habitual and inveterate prepossession and bigotry, by which they are induced to think, that the worst means may be employed to serve the best cause, which is always the cause they have embraced, it is fraud still. It is pious fraud, if you please: I would rather call it theological; but the doctor who shifts the idea, and keeps the word appropriated to it, that he may serve any purpose, is as arrant a cheat as the saint who interpreted the same passage of Scripture in different senses, according to the different opinions his orthodoxy required him to oppose. We may lament the imperfections of the human mind; we may blame those who do not give their attention to frame, and to preserve their ideas and notions with all the exactness necessary to make them materials of knowledge, not of error. But we have a right to abominate those who do their utmost to render the discovery of truth impracticable, to perpetuate controversy, and to pervert the use and design of language. I prefer ignorance to such learning, Swift's Bagatelle to such philosophy, and the disputes of a club where it does not prevail, to those of an academy or university where it does.

It is, in truth, in those places, and wherever metaphysics and theology have been made sciences, that the arts of controversial legerdemain are practised with most license, dexterity, and success. Ideas of corporeal substance are not so liable to vary, nor so exposed to perplexity and confusion by the abuse of words, as the ideas that we have, or rather that we suppose we have, of thinking substance. Every complex idea of any corporeal substance is not the same precise collection of simple ideas in every mind. But the most sensible of its qualities, those that are the most obvious to us according to the business we have with it, such as mark most, and distinguish enough, are put together in every mind. The peasant has not the same idea of gold as the miner, nor the miner as the chemist. This will be said, and it will be so far true, that the chemist will have more ideas of

qualities co-existing in this metal than the miner, and the miner more than the peasant. But the collection of simple ideas in the mind of him who has fewest will be ample, and distinct enough to fix the sort there, and to answer all his purposes; and, as long as nature maintains these collections of sensible qualities, the ideas of them can neither be confounded, nor lost. As long as gold, and iron, and men, and horses are in the world, their complex ideas will exist in human minds invariably: and though they may be more complex in some than in others, yet the additional ideas that increase, will not alter the collection enough to beget any material ambiguity.

The case is widely different when thinking substance becomes the object of our contemplation, when philosophers pretend by a supposed science, not only to spiritualise matter in some sort, if you will allow me to express myself so, and to consider forms abstracted from all matter, incorporeal essences and intelligible natures; but to reason and dogmatise about immaterial spirits, and to make souls for instance, as many as they want, souls for the world, for men, for all other animals, and for vegetables, souls rational and irrational, souls immaterial, and souls of so fine a texture, that they approach immateriality, though they are material. All such ideas and notions, and all such as are framed concerning them, are ill determined, and consequently ill preserved. Uncertain in their origin, they must needs be unsteady in their progress, and in the use that philosophers and divines make of them. Our ideas of corporeal substances are, no doubt, inadequate and superficial, and such as cannot reach the essence of any one particular substance; but they reach far enough for our use: and as far as this use is concerned, nay even a little further, the system of corporeal substances lies open to us. They are criterions in our power; and according to them we verify, correct, and maintain by observation and experience, as we acquire, the precise determinations of our ideas of them. But when we proceed from physics to that which is called metaphysics, and pretend to knowledge of general natures and immaterial beings, what do we less than pretend to general knowledge, where we are not capable of having even particular knowledge, properly so called? and to particular knowledge, where we have no criterion sufficient to verify, correct, and maintain all the ideas and notions that we put together, in order to compose something that passes for it? The sole criterion we have of immaterial spirit is our own spirit. The idea we have of thought by reflection, is as clear as that we have of extension by sensation. The ideas we have of some few modes of thinking, are as clear as those we have of numberless modes of extension. So far then we have a criterion, by which to judge of the immaterial spirits

we are pleased to create. I call them the creatures of metaphysics and theology; because in truth, considered as distinct substances, they are such. All spirits are hypothetical, except the infinite spirit, the father of spirits, the Supreme Being. But how confined is this criterion that extends no wider, nor rises any higher than the narrow confines, wherein we have perceptions of the operations of our own minds? They afford much room for imagination, and few means of knowledge. Our ideas of knowledge and power for instance, that arise from the perceptions we have of our own spirits, are applicable to them, and triable by them. But as soon as metaphysicians and divines presume to apply them improperly, to reason concerning the knowledge of the Supreme Being on those of the first sort, which have in this application no criterion; and to reason concerning the liberty of man on those of the second sort, without a due regard to what we experience in ourselves, which is their true criterion; how vague, and how unsteady do all these ideas, and these notions we frame by them, become? Of how much incoherent discourse, of how many repugnant opinions has not this absurd manner of philosophising been productive? In a word, and to conclude this subject here at least, all our methaphysical and theological ideas and notions are vague and unsteady as well as fantastical, for the most part, for want of criterions by which it is in our power to try them in the subjects about which we employ them, or for want of trying them by the criterions by which it is in our power to try them.

These inconveniences the lovers of truth may easily avoid.—We are under no obligation to be metaphysicians or divines. But there is another inconveniency not so easy to be avoided on subjects more important, because more real than those commonly called metaphysical and theological. The inconveniency I mean to speak of here, and have referred to already, consists in the difficulty of preserving steadily some of our ideas and notions when they are well determined, rightly taken from the nature of things, and tried and approved by their proper criterions. Mathematical, as well as moral ideas and notions, are made by the mind: and though suggested to it by sensible objects, yet both are properly creatures of the mind, and there they remain to be employed as archetypes. Thus far both are in the same case. But the difference that follows is great in itself, and in its consequences. The mathematician can call his senses in at every instant to aid his intellect; and by making his ideas become objects of his sight, as he does when he draws diagrams that are copies of them on paper, he not only pursues steadily, but is able to communicate to others, demonstrations which he could neither pursue, nor retain by the strength of his mental faculties alone,

nor explain to others by the help of words. Words are signs, not copies of ideas. An idea, a moral idea for instance, may be essentially changed, and the sign that stood for it before may stand for it afterwards, without causing always an immediate perception in the mind of this change. But whenever the least change is made in any idea of which we have before our eyes an outward visible copy, that change is perceived instantly; and the determination of ideas, which the mind is unable to maintain, is thus maintained by one of our senses. Moral ideas and notions, therefore, of which no such copies can be made, which are held together in the mind with the names assigned to them by nothing but the retentive power of the mind, and which can be signified by nothing but sounds that bear no resemblance to them, must fluctuate and vary, beget all the confusion, spread all the obscurity, and give occasion to all the fraud I have mentioned.

Definitions, it has been said, will prevent, or remedy this evil, and morality may be placed by the help of them "among the sciences capable of demonstration." That the first and great principles of natural religion may be demonstrated, and that ingenuous minds may be trained to make a just application of them in some particular cases, I acknowledge. But that the precise meaning of moral words can be so fixed and maintained, that the congruity or incongruity of the ideas and notions they stand for shall be always discerned, clearly and uniformly, I do not believe. Definitions, therefore, consisting of words, they cannot answer Mr. Locke's purpose, as it would not be hard to show in the very instances he brings. Intellect, the artificer, works lamely without his proper instrument, sense; which is the case when he works on moral ideas. Whenever he can employ this instrument, and as far as it can serve him, which is the case when he works on mathematical ideas, he works securely. I apprehend, therefore, that to expect a new method should be ever found, of preserving as steadily and invariably our moral ideas and notions, as we preserve those that are mathematical, is not very different from expecting that a method should be found, some time or other, of rendering things, that are not objects of sight by nature, visible by art. Ideas and notions of virtue and vice, very clearly defined, have been often confounded by schoolmen and casuists, in the most flagrant cases. They are so still by them and others in most discourses, and in all disputes about political or moral affairs. But no mathematician ever confounded the idea of any triangle with that of a square, nor that of a square with that of a circle.

SECTION V.

I have dwelled the longer on complex ideas and notions, because though simple ideas are truly the first principles of all our knowledge, yet the complex ideas into which they are compounded by nature, and the complex ideas and notions into which we compound them by the operations of our minds, are the more ready and immediate principles on which we endeavor to establish general knowledge. We could not attain it even in such degrees as are proportionable to our wants, and to the design of infinite Wisdom in making us what we are, in placing us where we are, and in giving us the faculties we have, without their assistance. If then these ideas and notions are so limited, as I have described them, by nature, and if we must often limit them still more by judgment, that they may be still more surely productive of real knowledge; if within this extent too they are so liable to be inaccurately framed, unsteadily maintained, and uncertainly communicated, there will result from these considerations sufficient reasons to confound the pride of philosophers, and to expose the vanity of much pretended science. But these reasons acquire still greater force, when we add some further considerations to the former. The lesson of nature, as I have called it, that is the information and instruction we gain by observing the constitution of our physical and moral systems, and the state and course of things that exist constantly, or transiently in them, ends with our complex ideas and notions. When nature leaves us, we are forced to put ourselves, in our ulterior progress, towards general knowledge, under the conduct of her mimic, art: so that if our feet are apt to slip, if we totter in the way, and are subject to ramble out of it, whilst nature is our guide, all this must needs happen much more when we have no other guide but art, and when we are reduced to supply natural imperfection by expedients. The truth is, the further we proceed under the conduct of art, the further we attempt to carry our thoughts beyond those originals whereby nature, obtruding on sense complex ideas of what does exist, and suggesting ideas and notions of what may exist, informs and instructs the mind, the more liable we are to fall into error by framing our ideas and notions wrong, by preserving unsteadily even those that we frame right, by presuming that we have ideas when we have really none, or that we know what we mean when we have no meaning at all. Metaphysicians and divines have raised their reputations on little else: and it will be worth our while to examine the truth of this assertion in some few instances, among many that might be produced. I say it will be worth our while, because the errors in

opinion, like the faults in conduct of the greatest men, are of the worst consequence, and deserve the most to be detected; because these philosophers, above all other men, have rendered the human mind the flatterer, the deceiver, and the debaucher of itself, "blanda adulatrix, et quasi lena sui." In short, because they have substituted mental artifice in the place of mental art, and have thereby encouraged mankind to continue ridiculously an imaginary progress in search of science, when nature and art are both at a stand.

How difficult, nay how impracticable the enlargement of knowledge, and communication of our thoughts to one another would be, if we remained absolutely confined to particulars, and unless means were found of supplying this defect, is obvious to reflection. The mind, therefore, makes its utmost efforts to generalise its ideas, begins early with such as are most familiar, comes in time to those that are less so, and is never at rest till it has found means of conceiving as well as it can its ideas collectively, and of signifying them in that manner to others. Complex ideas are made by uniting several simple ideas that have often no connection, nor relation to each other, except what the mind gives them, in one idea. General ideas, or notions, are attempted by endeavoring to assemble in one a variety of ideas, or notions, that have a relation, or likeness to each other. Nature helps in the first of these operations, as we have observed above; and we perform it, or we may perform it, with success. But she affords us little or no help in the last; and we fail in the attempt. She shows us men, but not man in general, and the same may be said of all other substances. She shows us, or we frame, ideas of particular figures; but neither does she show us, nor can we frame any idea of figure in general, nor general ideas of particular kinds of figure, any more than we can frame a general idea of substance, or of any particular kinds of substances. Once more, she shows us particular actions, and instances of behavior of men towards men, or we frame ideas in our minds of such particular actions, or instances of behavior, and we term them just, or unjust; but neither does she show us, nor can we frame any idea of moral or immoral in general, no nor any general idea of these particular kinds, just and unjust. The mind would make all these creatures if it could; but not having this natural power, an art is properly, and usefully employed to make particular ideas serve the purposes of general, by giving them the rank of archetypes in the mind, and to make particular notions become general, by comprising them in definitions that we refer to as to archetypes of particular kinds. Thus knowledge, particular by nature, becomes in some degree general by art.

It would be absurd to imagine, as some philosophers have imagined, that nature casts her productions in certain specific moulds. But we may say, when we speak of things as they appear to us, that they are classed in different sorts, which we distinguish by our sensations. Our simple ideas are many, as many as the sensible qualities of outward objects that excite them in us. But the various combinations of these simple into complex ideas of substances are innumerable, and yet each of these combinations is as distinctly and uniformly perceived by us, as the simple ideas contained in it. By this it is, and without this it could not be, that both of them answer God's design, and man's use. If mankind in general did not receive the same impressions, and by these impressions the same sensations from outward objects, much confusion and disorder would arise in human life. Without troubling ourselves to inquire like Malebranche,* whether the same motions of the fibres are constantly produced by the same objects, or whether the same sensations are constantly produced, and the same ideas excited in the soul by the same motions of the fibres, of all which he knew no more than such ignorant men as you and I are; let us content ourselves to understand this uniformity as it has been explained in the third section, and conformably to experience.

This being established, we may observe further, that the mind proceeds to generalise, in the utmost extent, the simple ideas it has got, though not the complex ideas of substances; as if, the component ideas being generalised, men had perceived there was no need of generalising the complex ideas compounded of them, and of something whereof they had only an obscure idea suggested to the mind by all their sensations, an idea of substance wherein the sensible qualities producing simple ideas inhered. In the case, therefore, of simple ideas we employ, to speak the language of philosophy, not only concrete but abstract terms, and we say, for instance, not only that milk or snow is white, but we talk of whites in general, and signify them by the abstract term whiteness. The adjective white, joined to a substantive, is the sign of a particular idea, and necessary, therefore, as well as proper to be used in speaking of particular substances, by every one of which it is determined. But the substantive whiteness is authorised by custom alone, and is determined by nothing. It is a term invented by the art of the mind. When it is used, I perceive no determinate, specific, general idea, wherein all the various tints of white which I have perceived, and many there may be which no human eye has ever perceived, are compre-

* Recher. de la Verité, lib. 1, c. 13.

hended. I have no perception of a general idea of white abstracted from every particular idea of this sort. The idea I have, when this word is used, is always that of some particular white extension, or of several such whose ideas rush confusedly into the mind together.

In the case of substances, the art of the mind is not carried quite so far, though it makes as we grow up, by observation and experience, some attempts of this kind towards general knowledge. The child who prattled of papa and mamma, of crop and tray, advances in years, and talks of man and woman, of horse and dog, and soon after of animal. He learns certain common names by which he signifies beings that appear to him alike, and give him nearly the same complex ideas. He learns another common name still more comprehensive, by which he signifies things that do not give him, even nearly, the same complex ideas, but that are confined however to the same class by some peculiar, simple ideas, and contradistinguished by them from every other class more or less. The words man, or animal, raise in his mind no general idea; but in this case, as in the former, some particular idea of man, which the mind can frame without thinking of Alexander, or Henry, rises there, and becomes representative of all men in general; or else several ideas of men, and other animals, rush confusedly into the mind together; that is, so rapidly, that though they are truly successive, yet this succession is imperceptible. Thus far the art of the mind is carried towards a general knowledge of substances, and custom has authorised it no further. The schools indeed invented, among many other words to which they had no clear nor determinate ideas annexed, those of humanity and animality. Now if nothing more had been intended by those words than to signify, by one sound, all that we understand when we speak of the apparent natures of men and animals, such as they appear to our senses, I cannot see that they deserved to be rejected, and I shall make no scruple to use them if the occasion of doing so presents itself. But if they are employed by any profound ontosophist, as they were by the schoolmen, who pretended to have such general ideas abstracted from all particulars, ideas of general natures and real essences of substances; they deserve to be rejected as much as the gobleity and fableity of Plato, with which the Cynic made himself so merry Even the general names of simple ideas of sensation can be received, according to my apprehension, in no sense but the former; and whiteness, if we assumed that we had such a general idea, abstracted from all particulars, and adequate to the real essence of white, would deserve to be exploded as much as humanity and animality. All these words must be confined to their proper use, and not applied to any other signi-

fication. In the first case they will be subservient to an art, in the latter to an artifice of the mind.

The same caution that is to be had, when the mind generalises its simple and complex ideas of substances, is to be had, and the same distinction is to be made between general and abstract ideas, in the sense in which the latter are supposed by some philosophers to be framed by the mind, when we employ words to signify our ideas of modes and relations. We say, for instance, not only that certain figures are triangular, but we discourse of triangularity. We say not only that such an action is just, but we discourse of justice. We say not only that such things are similar or like, but we discourse of similitude or likeness. We have not however any ideas of such general natures abstracted from all the particular ideas that we suppose to be comprehended in them. These words triangularity, justice, likeness, recall to the mind some particular idea or notion of each sort, or else a confusion of particular ideas or notions, as was said in the case of substances. They excite no other idea nor notion. But yet the difference between the two cases is vast. Our ideas, and notions, of modes and relations, being creatures of the mind, though we are unable to frame any that are not particular in their several kinds, and have by consequence in our minds no idea nor notion, abstracted and distinct from all the particular ideas and notions that the mind has framed of every kind; yet the real essence of each particular being the particular idea or notion that the mind has framed, we are able to ascertain by definitions, and to reduce into propositions, a general nature; of which every particular idea or notion does, and must partake, to be of that kind, that is, to be what it is. I do not know, and therefore I cannot define, nor advance propositions concerning substance in general, nor the real essence of any particular substance, nor by consequence the manner in which, and qualities by which they produce the simple and complex ideas I receive from them; nor finally the conformity, if any such there is, between all these ideas and their archetypes. But I know, and can define the real essence of all triangles; which I name triangularity. Though I have no idea of triangularity "abstracted with pains and skill from the several species of triangles, and present to the mind independently of them:" yet I know that this definition, "a space included by three lines that meet at three angles," contains in it the real essence of every particular triangle whereof I have the idea. A philosopher may take as much pains as he pleases to abstract from those particulars wherein the species differ, and to retain those only wherein they agree, which Cudworth calls the cutting off chips, as I remember; though he frames, by this method, the definition I have mentioned, yet neither he who framed

it, nor his scholar who learned it, will be able, I presume, to consider a "space included by three lines that meet at three angles," without having some particular triangle in his mind. If we had an abstract idea of triangularity, properly so called, it might be said to be the idea of all triangles; but it could not be said, as it has been said, to be the idea of none. In short, we define the general nature of triangles on the consideration of particular triangles; and this definition is a true proposition in abstract consideration, though it be not an abstract idea. But to make it of any use, we must descend to particular knowledge again; that is, to particular, real ideas, which might have been pursued, though the terms of this definition had never been invented.

Thus again, I know the general nature, the real essence of justice, and am able to define it in very clear propositions, though I am not able to frame any general idea or notion of it abstracted from all particulars, and containing them all. It is not, most certainly, to do as we would be done by; for that is more properly a definition of benevolence, than of justice, as every one, who considers the constant force and the occasional injustice of self-love must admit. But it consists in a disposition to give to every one what is his own, where there is property; to deal by others according to the natural fitness or unfitness of things where there is no property, and in other distinct notions, which will altogether amount to a definition, if we may be said to define, when we only enumerate particular notions, and we can do nothing more when we set about to explain the general nature of justice; for which I may appeal to every man who has meditated well on the subject. To conclude; I know the general nature, and the real essence of likeness, and am able to explain it by a very short definition; for it consists in that relation which arises from a uniformity of appearance in things that are distinct in existence. But still I have no general idea nor notion of this relation, abstracted from all my particular ideas of things so related.*

* These disputes about abstraction may be deemed after all, perhaps, to be purely verbal. A loose determination of the word idea may have given occasion to them. A proper distinction between ideas, and notions, may help to reconcile them. These two words are commonly used by inadvertency and habit, or authority, as if they were synonymous. Mr. Locke, and even his antagonist in this dispute, the bishop of Cloyne, have used them so. I have done the same in all I have written to you. But I think that the example before us shows how necessary it is to distinguish them, in order to maintain a philosophical precision of terms.

The word idea should, I presume, be held to signify one single perception of the mind, whether simple or complex, whether produced by the impressions of outward objects, or by the operations of our own minds, by sensation or reflection. These ideas are preserved in the memory by frequent repetitions

What advances now do we make in general knowledge by this expedient which the art of the mind has invented? Not such as philosophers would have believed, but some however. Though we cannot by any power of the mind frame ideas of general natures and essences, which neither do nor can exist separately from particulars, yet it is some advance to be able to comprehend, under one consideration, a great number of parti-

of the same impressions, and the same operations. But those of them which can be painted, as it were, on the canvass of the mind, like single objects of internal sight, and like pictures of the original impressions which were made on it, or of the original forms which were raised in it, are best preserved and most steadily determined. They are all particular, and have no generality but that of application. They represent to the mind that which does, or may exist. Of that which neither does, nor can exist, we can have no idea. The ideal man, or the ideal horse, which the mind perceives, is a particular idea that represents all the men, and all the horses that exist, or ever did exist; and the ideal triangle is as truly a particular idea that represents all the triangles that exist, or can exist in the mind, or out of it. The mind indeed has a power of varying, without destroying the idea; for instance, it adds wings to the man, and to the horse, one becomes an angel, the other a hippogryph: and as it can represent the ideal man to be white or black, crooked or straight, so it can represent the triangle to be rectangle, oblique, equilateral, equicrural, or scalenon. Thus far the mind can generalise its ideas, and I think myself sure that mine can generalise them no further. But when we have been accustomed to call every thing an idea, that is an object of the mind in thinking, we fall easily into that confusion of language, whereby men are led very often, as I apprehend that they are in the present case, to dispute, and to mean the same thing. We might avoid it, I presume, if we distinguished between ideas and notions, if we conceived the former to be particular in their nature, and general only by their application, and the latter to be general in their nature, and particular only by their application; in short, if we consider how notions succeed ideas, and how they become the immediate instruments of general knowledge, when these can be such no longer. Particular ideas of actual, or possible existence, are made general in some sort, that is, in their effect, as it has been said, and as it is allowed on all hands. But the power of generalising ideas is so insufficient, that it goes no further. We make one phantasme of a man stand for all men, and one of a horse for all horses; but here our progress by ideas, that is, by single perceptions of the mind, stops. We have none of humanity, none of horseity, and much less have we any of animality. Just so the phantasme of a particular triangle stands for every triangle of that species, but we have no idea of triangularity, and much less of figure. We make a particular stand for a general idea in this case, as in the two former; but in no case can we make ideas that are particular, and that can represent only what does, or may exist, become ideas of general natures that cannot exist. There is, however, a great difference between cases of the former, and cases of the latter kind. The essences of substances are absolutely unknown to us, but the essences of complex modes are perfectly known, so that we have clear and distinct notions, though we cannot have clear and distinct ideas, nor indeed any ideas at all of them. From the contemplation of particular triangles we collect a notion of their general nature. We do more; by contemplating the various terminations of finite extension, we collect a notion of the general nature of figure. We have ideas of these no more than we have ideas of humanity or animality, but we know what we mean,

culars, by appropriating general names to the several lots, if the term may be allowed me, into which the mind has sorted its ideas and notions. The expedient facilitates extremely, as every man who thinks must observe, not only the communication of our thoughts to others, but the progress of them in their several trains, and all the operations of the mind about its ideas; for though these general names have no abstract ideas annexed to them, nor, strictly speaking, any ideas or notions, yet are they not unaccompanied by ideas and notions. That would be to have no meaning at all, whereas they have a meaning, a plain and useful meaning or intention. What they have not, they borrow. They create no ideas in the mind, but they give occasion to the mind to collect and apply such ideas and notions as are there already. They call them forth, they marshal them, as it were, and by the manner in which, and by the occasions on which they do so, these names produce all the effect they are designed to produce, and carry us towards general knowledge, as far as our feeble intellect can crawl with their assistance, and much further than we could advance without it.

I think I have said nothing here which is not obvious and plain, and yet I have opposed, in almost all I have said, men of the greatest name in philosophy. But when we must oppose them, or belie intuitive knowledge, there is no reason to hesitate. I know that, though I can make some abstractions of my ideas, I am utterly unable to make such abstractions as Mr. Locke and other great masters of reason have taken it for granted that they could and did make. This I know as intuitively, and as certainly, as I know that I exist. If the difference lay in the degree alone, I should readily acknowledge that other men might abstract better, and further than myself. But I am conscious that there is no such power in my mind in any degree, and therefore I conclude, since we are all made of the same clay, a little coarser or

and are able to explain our meaning when we speak of these, which we are not when we speak of the others.

Much more might be said to show the difference between complex ideas and notions, and between general and abstract ideas, and the advantage that those (in the conception of which, internal sense, and in the communication of which, external sense help intellect) have over such as are merely objects of intellect. I might expose even to ridicule, the stir that is made about the pains and skill our masters pretend that they take to form the supposed idea of triangularity, for instance, that they may teach their scholars to know a triangle when they see it; though the meanest of their scholars, who have been used to contemplate particular triangles, will have made this notable discovery, "that every triangle is a space comprehended by three lines, and containing three angles," without any help of theirs, or skill or pains of his own. All the merit of our masters seems to be this, they begin to learn at the right, they begin to teach at the wrong end; which is an observation that may be enforced by what Mr. Locke himself says about maxims.

a little finer, that there is no such power in their minds. I conclude, after my Lord Bacon, that, "since abstract ideas have been introduced, and their dignity exalted with so much confidence and authority, the dreaming part of mankind has in a manner prevailed over the waking." If Mr. Locke could dream he had such a power as he describes this of abstracting to be (a power to form with "some pains and skill the general idea of a triangle," for instance, "neither oblique, nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but all, and none of these at once*") let writers learn to be less dogmatical, and readers to be less implicit. It is undeniable that there is such a thing as philosophical delirium. Men of the coolest tempers, we see, are liable to be seized by it, and when they are so, even their minds are apt to flatter, to deceive, and to debauch themselves. I quote this as an instance of the mind's being debauched, as well as flattered and deceived; for surely it is a sort of debauchery to turn art into artifice: and he does no less, whether he means it or not, who, instead of employing general words for the purposes we have mentioned, vends them for signs of ideas abstracted as no mortal could ever abstract.

Since knowledge has increased, their own knowledge and that of other men, philosophers and divines have been forced to moderate their pretensions. They have fallen a little in the value they had set on human intellect: and I suspect, or rather I would hope, that they must fall a good deal more, how unwilling soever they may be to part with that tinsel, which has passed so long for gold and silver. But there is still a remainder of the old leaven in philosophy. Many opinions that were assumed without any proof, or on the slightest, are still entertained as opinions, or established as doctrines. Among these gross errors there is scarce any more gross, or of more extensive influence, than this that supposes a power in the mind, which the mind has not, and the reality of ideas of general natures, though these cannot exist abstractedly from particulars. This error is the great principle on which many fine-spun logical and metaphysical speculations proceed, and from most of which we might be delivered, to the honor of common sense, the improvement of real knowledge, and the advantage of mankind, if it was sufficiently exploded.—Till it is so, and as long as the leaven of this error among others continues to ferment, men will be apt to misspend their time in search of fantastic knowledge, by the means of imaginary powers. The field of knowledge, which Bacon, and Des Cartes, and Locke have purged of so many weeds, may be therefore over-run again by a new crop springing from old roots that they neglected to

* Essay, l. 4, c. 7.

grub, or helped to preserve. Metaphysics may not only maintain, but confirm and enlarge their empire. The lofty madness of Plato, and the pompous jargon of Aristotle, may be propagated again, with as great success as ever, from those colleges and schools that deserved once the name of venerable bedlams. The learned of another generation may see, perhaps universally, immaterial essences and eternal ideas in the divine mind; they may contemplate substantial forms, and comprehend even the entelechia, whilst they neither see visible, nor feel solid extension. All this may happen, and if dulness should re-establish her empire in poetry, whilst that of madness is restored in philosophy, how glorious an age may the next become, when all the defects, and all the follies of this are complete? Once more, all this may happen. Our learned queen interests herself in nice and subtile disputations about space: from metaphysics she rises to theology. She attends frequently to the controversy, almost fourteen hundred years old, and still carried on with as much warmth, and as little success as ever, about that profound mystery the Trinity. She studies with much application the "analogy of revealed religion to the constitution and course of nature."—She understands the whole argument perfectly, and concludes, with the right reverend author, that it is not "so clear a case that there is nothing in revealed religion." Such royal, such lucrative encouragement must needs keep both metaphysics and the sublimest theology in credit; and in short,

"Signs following signs, lead on the mighty year."

In the mean time, let what has been here said stand for one example of the arts employed by the mind to enlarge its knowledge, and to let it serve to show how these arts degenerate into artifice, deceive even the mind that invented them, and, instead of enlarging knowledge, enlarge and multiply error.

Another example of the same kind it may be proper to consider. Hobbes says somewhere, that words are the counters of wise men, and the money of fools. The observation is just, and the expression happy. Ideas and notions are the money of wise men, and they pay with these; whilst they mark and compute with words, the money of fools. But yet so difficult is the intellectual commerce, so narrow the intellectual fund, that the wisest men are frequently obliged to employ their money like counters, and their counters like money; in one case, however, without loss, in the other without fraud. We may be said to do the first, that is, to employ our money like counters, when we employ ideas of one kind to mark and suggest ideas of another. We employ, as it were, in this case, good and current money of one species, to compute and fix the sum payable in another: and thus

guineas may stand in the place of shillings, or shillings serve to represent guineas. This happens whenever we make use of figures, and figures are so interwoven into language, that they make up a great part of our discourse, and a greater than is commonly apprehended.

The figurative style is peculiarly that of poets, or of the tribe nearest allied to theirs, I mean orators. In this style the frightened wave returns: or Cicero, in his Philippics, thundered against Antony. To employ this style with true propriety, is hard no doubt. It must needs be hard to keep up an exact precision and propriety of ideas and words, when two sets of each are concerned, since it is extremely so to keep them up, when one set of each is alone the business of the mind. It is hard for another reason; because imagination, whose talents are neither precision nor propriety, not the former at least, is employed in the application of one of these sets of ideas and words to the other, and because it rarely happens that great heat of imagination, and great coolness of judgment, that happy association which forms a genius, and appears eminently in all your writings, go together, and keep pace with one another. When they do so, the figurative style, that some of our neighbors have almost rejected even out of poetry, and that we have abused most licentiously in it, serves to enforce, as well as to explain and adorn, but never to deceive. Somebody has said of the boldest figure in rhetoric, the hyperbole, that it lies without deceiving: and, if I may venture to make a little alteration, in a definition given by my Lord Bacon, I will say of rhetoric in general, the practice of which I esteem much, the theory little, that it applies images, framed or borrowed by imagination, to ideas and notions which are framed by judgment, so as to warm the affections, to move the passions, and to determine the will; so as to assist nature, not to oppress her.

But besides the use which poets make with some profusion, as they have a right to do, and orators make, or should make more sparingly, of this art of the mind, which, transferring ideas from one subject to another, makes that become graceful and reasonable, and thereby useful when the application is judicious, which would be monstrous and absurd, and thereby hurtful without it; there is another use, which the severest philosophical writers may and do make of it in their meditations, as well as in their discourses; an use that if it does not serve to increase, serves most certainly to facilitate and propagate knowledge. They who meditate (for every man, and probably every animal thinks) must have observed, that the mind employs all its forces, and memory and imagination among the rest, not only to form opinions, or to arrive at knowledge, but to set the objects of opinion,

or knowledge, in the fullest and clearest light for its own satisfaction, and for the ease of communicating these thoughts to other minds in the same order, and with the same energy as they are contemplated by it. Not only judgment compares in a steady train, ideas and notions that are present to it and those that are intermediate, those that sagacity discovers to help the process of comparing; but memory and the faculty of imagining are employed to bring in adventitious helps. Such they may be called, for though foreign ideas divert the attention of the mind, when they break in unsought and by violence, they help it often when they have been sought and are admitted by choice. They lead the mind, indirectly and round about, as it were, in many cases, to such truths, or to such evidence of truth as could not have been attained so easily, nor so fully without them.

Mr. Locke, in the preface to his famous essay, as he entitled it with great modesty, since it is surely the most complete work of this kind that any language can boast, excuses himself for "dwelling long on the same argument sometimes and for expressing it different ways, by alleging that some objects had need to be turned on every side; and that when a notion is new, it is not one simple view of it that will gain it admittance into every understanding, or fix it there with a clear and lasting impression—that our understandings are no less different than our palates;" and more to the same purpose. Now if it be necessary to present our notions to the view of others in several lights, and under variety of expressions, I cannot see why they should not be sometimes viewed through the medium of figure; nor why the palates of those who relish this style should not be gratified. Mr. Locke gratifies them in this very place, and in most pages of his work. What is the juxtaposition of ideas? what is that chain which connects, by intermediate ideas that are the links of it, ideas that are remote, but figurative style? what else are those dormant, that is, sleeping pictures, which are wakened as it were, and brought into appearance by an act of the mind? what else are the pictures drawn there, but laid in fading colors, or the images calcined to dust by the flames of a fever? His invective therefore, against figurative speech, in his chapter of the abuse of words, must be understood not of the use, but of the abuse of this style, though it seems to go further, or it will not be agreeable to his own practice, nor to the truth, as I imagine. False eloquence there is, no doubt, and fraudulent eloquence too.—Figurative style often causes one, and is often employed by the other; but there is false and fraudulent reasoning too without eloquence: and we may find as much trifling and fallacy in some of the most dry didactic writings, as can be shown in those of poets and orators.

Rhetoric may be a powerful instrument of deceit and error, and so may logic too. Both of them are impertinent when they are reduced into arts, and are cultivated and followed as such. But if rhetoric were banished out of the world, and logic with it, eloquence and reason would still remain. Mr. Locke says, very figuratively, and very eloquently, speaking against figure and eloquence, that they have "like the fair sex two prevailing beauties, to be spoken against." He could not speak against them out of their language. How should he? We may disaffect eloquence as much as we please, or nature may have saved us this trouble by refusing us the talent, but we must cease to speak if we lay figurative speech wholly aside. Figures are so necessary in the communication, at least, of our thoughts, that they are wove into the very constitution of language, as we have observed already. If we did not choose, we should be forced to employ them often in common conversation about common objects, and the ordinary affairs of life; and they are still more necessary, when subjects more abstruse and more abstracted from sensible objects are concerned.

God alone knows how nearly external and internal sense, of which we have one common perception, though the objects be different, and though the latter be occasioned and limited by the former, are allied. All that will ever be said to explain it, will explain no more than all that has been said already. But however, to assert that there is no other source of ideas but sensation, is to assert something most evidently false; for to explain what has been touched already, or hinted at least, we have as determinate, and as clear ideas of thought, as of extension or solidity; of our inward faculties, of their operations, and of the modes of thinking, as of the powers, the actions, and the modifications of mere body. Were it otherwise, we should have no intellectual ideas at all; for ideas, if they cannot be represented in thought without corporeal images, are not such most certainly. But now, though corporeal images have nothing to do in framing, they have much to do, and bear a principal part in communicating intellectual ideas. I say a principal part only, for some of these are signified without their help. We say, that we perceive, discern, abstract, compound, or compare our ideas; but we say too, that we think, and that we know. The former expressions, and a multitude of others, are taken from outward and applied figuratively to inward sensations. The latter, and some few others, perhaps, signify immediately, and without any figure, the intellectual idea they are designed to signify.

If we ask how all this comes to pass, the true answer seems obvious enough. By an art, which experience has suggested to the mind. The ideas of outward objects have their criterions in

these objects. Body is the archetype of corporeal ideas, and this criterion therefore is common to all mankind. But intellectual ideas having no sensible, have no such common criterion. He who had first ideas of extension and solidity, and who invented the words, could explain his meaning by appealing to the senses of other men. But he could not communicate his ideas of reflection by the same short and easy method, the passion of his mind in receiving these ideas by sensation, nor the operations of his mind about them afterwards. He borrowed therefore corporeal images to express them, and talked of perceiving, discerning, and so on, in the figurative style. Thus we may conceive how men came to employ corporeal ideas, for the most part, to explain the intellectual phenomena, and sometimes to assist even their own reflections on them. The art was reasonably invented, and usefully employed. But it soon became artifice, as soon as philosophers took into their heads to affect such science as they are incapable of attaining. Then it was that they employed, among many other expedients, the absurd use of figures that figured no real ideas, nor any thing more than philosophical dreams, and whimsies of overheated brains. The same practice has continued from that time to this, from Plato down to Malebranche, from Aristotle down to Leibnitz, from Plotinus and Jamblicus down to Agrippa and Fludd. It begins to grow out of date. Men require now something more real than figure, more precise than allusion, and more particular than metaphysical abstractions. Philosophers may write as sublimely as they please about pneumatics, or the doctrine of spirits, and as profoundly as they please about ontology, or the doctrine of Being abstracted from all Being. They will be taken up for amusement, like other writers of romance, and be laid aside like them, when any thing more worthy of attention presents itself to the mind.

It is time indeed, that they should be treated in this manner, and that men who betray themselves should impose no longer on others. When I say that they betray themselves, I mean it particularly with regard to the inconsistency of their pretensions and their practice. St. Austin says, somewhere or other, for I quote the passage from the logic of Portroyal, that "men are so accustomed since the fall to consider corporeal things alone, the images of which come into the brain by the senses, that most of them believe they cannot conceive a thing when they cannot represent it to themselves under a corporeal image." Such a one, I suppose, was the logician, who for want of enlarging his definition of idea to whatever is an object of the mind in thinking, or for want of supplying this defect by a true definition of notion, which would have been better perhaps, was so absurd,

and so profane, as to advance that we conceive God under the image of a venerable old man, because we have no other sensible idea of him. But since the mistaken belief spoken of by St. Austin is owing to custom, and is that of most men only, I would ask why so great a philosopher, and saint, as he was, followed this evil custom, and filled his works with more, and more forced applications of corporeal images to intellectual and divine subjects than any writer, perhaps, of that metaphorising and allegorising age? Shall we say with one of his disciples, who in every other respect, and even in this was his equal at least, that "the soul is become since the fall as if it were corporeal by inclination, and that the love it has for things sensible diminishes constantly the union, or the relation it has to things intelligible?"* But besides that one of these fathers ascribes to a fatal necessity, what the other ascribes only to an ill habit, how can this happen to those extraordinary men, who abstract their souls from every thing material, and wrap themselves up in pure intellect so frequently, although they confess that "the mind depends in some sort on a portion of matter?" How can it happen to souls that are "united with the supreme mind immediately, and in a most intimate manner, though the distance between them be infinite?" †

Ordinary men may be content to make the most of the commerce they find established in their nature between sense and intellect, to push their inquiries about mind as far, and no further than a few general notions which intuitive observation will justify, and in this process, and in the communication of their intellectual ideas, to avail themselves of corporeal ideas, and to make the little they know of body subservient to the less that they can know of mind. This is enough, no doubt, for vulgar souls confined to material habitations, wherein they feel the weight of a heavy atmosphere, and the malignity of an easterly blast. But it is not enough for those who are raised above the vulgar, metaphysicians by nature, divines by grace, "all whose ideas are to be found in the efficacious substance of the divinity,"‡ and into whom "a human soul, and a rational mind were insinuated not to be quickened, not to be blessed, not to be illuminated, except by the very substance of God."§ These men are more conversant with intelligible than sensible beings, with the intellectual world over which they range, than with the material world whose existence they deny sometimes, and therefore

* Recherche de la Verité, l. i, c. 13. † Ib. Pref.

‡ Recherche de la Ver. l. 3, p. 2, c. 6.

§ Insinuavit nobis Christus animam humanam, et mentem rationalem non vegetari, non beatificari, non illuminari nisi ab ipsa substantia Dei. Ib. cited from St. Austin in Joan. trac. 23.

it should seem that it would have been more easy to them to have invented a metaphysical language, than to have continued the use of words already appropriated to ideas as distant as those of real beings from the *entia rationis*, or as those of body from those of spirit. It would have been likewise of extreme benefit to mankind, whom these philosophers take so much generous pains to instruct, if they had been able, by the help of such a language, to set their sublime conceptions in a direct and full light, instead of that indirect and half light which comes reflected from images foreign to them.

I am ready, therefore, on this account to lament that the attempt of bishop Wilkins, to form such a language, miscarried, and that Leibnitz neither finished his alphabet of human thoughts, nor his metaphysical algebra. It may be said, perhaps, that these helps, great as they would be, would be such only for the greatest genii, and that we have, therefore, a vast obligation to these philosophers, who make no longer the distinction that their predecessors made of initiated and profane, but deliver the mysteries of their science in vulgar language, with condescension to our gross conceptions, that would never comprehend them if they were kept in their native abstraction, instead of being clothed with ideas that fall under the view of imagination. Just so, it is said, that the sacred authors writ agreeably to all the vulgar notions of the ages and countries in which they lived, out of regard to their ignorance, and to the gross conceptions of the people: as if these authors had not writ for all ages and all countries, or as if truth and error were to be followed like fashions where they prevailed. This condescension, then, is very ill placed, and it would have become much better the great men we speak of, to have raised their fellow-creatures up, than to have let themselves down; to have cured us of all our errors, than to have left us in any; and to have abstracted us, or to have taught us plainly the great secret of abstracting ourselves in our meditations from all things sensible, than to have left us immersed in them.

But to speak more seriously and more plainly; the truth is, that if these admired masters of reason did not hold the vulgar language, and make up their intellectual schemes of corporeal ideas, they would have nothing to say more than every man, who contemplates his own mind with attention, may know without their help. They are so far from being confined and clogged by the use of the idea they take from body and apply to mind, that it is by their means alone they extend their range and seem to rise. Observe how father Malebranche sets out in the very first section of his Research of Truth. He begins by considering perception and will. One of these is a passive, the

other an active power of the mind. We know them intuitively, or the ideas we have of them by reflection are perfectly clear and distinct, so clear and distinct, that definitions and explanations of these, as of all our simple ideas, can only serve to perplex the mind and to render them obscure. To what purpose then did this philosopher descend into a long detail of comparisons between these two faculties of the mind, and two of the properties that belong to matter, that of receiving figures, and that of being determined to various motions? It was not necessary to explain what needed no explanation, but it was necessary to lay, as he did lay with much ingenuity though very precariously, some of the foundations of this system.

This is the common practice of metaphysical writers, and what Malebranche and our Berkeley have done so plausibly, and so agreeably, that they, who are far from admitting the systems of either, read the writings of both with the utmost pleasure the most heavy philosopher, whose name ever ended in *us*, pretends to feel. Nor shall we be much surprised at their success, if we consider how the most extravagant poets, such as Ariosto for example, who wander continually beyond the bounds of nature, and wherever a lawless fancy leads them, soften sometimes the grossest absurdities under the mask of figures. Struck by these, the mind grows attentive to them, stops its attention there, and rather supposes an application than examines it.

When amusement alone is concerned, and not instruction, this may be pardonable on both sides, in the author and in the reader. But in more serious studies, where one writes to instruct, and the other reads to be instructed, it is pardonable in neither. One rule, therefore, ought to be observed inviolably, the rule I mean of admitting, or rejecting figures as they are justified, or not justified by their application. Their application is their criterion. Metaphysicians and divines, therefore, who have made figures and comparisions of so great consequence by their use of them, should consider that the principal and most proper use of them, is like that of a varnish on a picture. As a painter would be thought mad who should varnish an unpainted canvass, so must they be exposed to this censure, or to one more severe, if it appears at any time that they had no clear and determinate ideas in their minds, concerning intellectual subjects, and spiritual natures and operations, when they employed, under pretence of explaining them, so many others borrowed from the objects of sense. When they have really such ideas in their minds, they must remember too that figures and comparisons are varnish still. It must not be used to alter the intellectual picture, it must only serve to give a greater lustre, and to make it better seen. Intellectual ideas and notions, in the mind of the philosopher or

divine, should lead them to the invention of figures, and these figures should lead the scholar to these intellectual ideas and notions. When the latter is not so led, easily and almost unavoidably, the figures are improper, or he has a right to conclude that the philosopher or divine had no such ideas nor notions in his mind. Now the first of these proceedings is impertinent, and the second is an arrant fraud. Figures in general, these of of speech, and all others that do not typify determinately, are unworthy of rational creatures, how much more of God? and figures that typify nothing, are nothing, or they are worse than nothing; they are so many lies, since they pretend to denote something real, when nothing real exists. How the sight of that brazen serpent, which Moses erected in the desert, cured the Israelites of the venomous bites of real serpents, I know not. Miraculously, say our divines. Just as other images work cures at this day, say your divines. Be this as it will, the figure typified very determinately what God intended it should typify, when he said, "pone eum pro signo." But when your divines and ours agree to make it a sign of the Christ lifted up on the cross, and crucified, he must be very cabalistical indeed who can discover the same determination. Real serpents had caused a real plague. A brazen serpent was the figure that signified this event to be over. It signified, therefore, at the same time, that the son of God himself was to come into the world near two thousand years afterwards, to deliver mankind from the allegorical plague of sin, which he did not most certainly cause. How reasonable is one, how absurd the other application of this figure? How necessary is it therefore to examine scrupulously the application of every figure, that we may not be imposed on by false appearances? But I will conclude these Reflections by an example taken from figurative speech. It will be thus more close to my purpose, and that it may be the stronger to show the abuse of figures, it shall be taken from one that has a real, and be contrasted with one that has an imaginary application.

The word discourse is derived from a Latin verb, which signifies to run about, and by the motions of our legs, and the agitation of our whole body (for when the word was invented all men believed they had bodies) to traverse many different grounds, or the same ground many different ways. Now the application of this corporeal image to what passes in the mind, or to the action of the mind when we meditate on various subjects, or on many distinct parts of the same subject, and when we communicate these thoughts to one another, sometimes with greater, and sometimes with less agitation and rapidity, is obvious. It answers as nearly as such applications can answer, and there is no

danger that this figure should communicate a false idea, or fail to produce that which it is designed to produce. There can be neither equivocation, perplexity, nor disappointment in the use of it.

The word inspiration is derived, like the other, from a Latin verb which signifies to blow in; and it has been said, that "the image might be borrowed to denote an action of God in an extraordinary manner, influencing, exciting, and enlightening the mind of a prophet, or apostle." How many assumptions are here in one short sentence? and how impossible must it be to come at any thing on which a reasonable mind can rest, whilst figures are explained by other figures that want explanation as much? Influencing is a vague term, and may be applied several ways with equal propriety. But exciting and enlightening denote different kinds of action, and neither of them has any relation to inspiration, or blowing in. Here then is metaphor heaped on metaphor, without any true application to an intellectual idea, and we know as little what is meant by inspiration as we did before. I conceive inspiration even less than abstraction. The latter, such as it is represented by most philosophers, appears to me impossible; but I conceive what the supposed operation of the mind signified by this figurative term is, and by conceiving what is meant, or the application of the term, I conceive the apparent impossibility of the thing. But I have no more conception of this supposed action of the divine on the human mind, than I have of the spiration by which the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son, according to the decision of the council of Florence that met to reconcile the Greek and Latin churches in the fifteenth century. The doctors of abstraction, therefore, require that we should believe against knowledge, and those of inspiration, that we should be implicit without it. Now this would be a great deal too much, even if we did not know the use that has been made of the supposed natural power of abstraction, and of the supposed supernatural gift of inspiration. But both are sufficiently known, and it is a little too late, and but a little, to impose either on us in the character of philosophers. If we submit to be implicit in another character, and in one of the cases, as far as it is necessary to keep us even now within the pale of the Christian church, we shall do very prudently. But it will be true, however, that the term of inspiration is a figure that gives us no intellectual idea, because it is not really the image of any.

There was a time, and it lasted long, when this term was employed in a literal sense. I refer to the time when Heathenish, Jewish, and Christian superstition prevailed separately first, and then unitedly. Ignorance and fear produced superstition, and

superstition in its turn maintained ignorance and fear in the minds of men. Thus superstition broached the notion of inspiration, and when the notion was once established, and the fact believed, supposed inspiration served to confirm and authorise superstition. That which has happened in so many other instances, happened in this, a groundless and absurd opinion which grew into vogue in dark ages, and was consecrated by a rude and ignorant people, prevailed in ages more enlightened. Men adopted what they would not have invented, and knowledge seemed to increase for no other reason, or to no other purpose, than to defend, to cultivate and to improve error.

Inspiration, which has since been ascribed to a metaphysical cause that metaphysicians cannot explain, was esteemed at first a physical operation that was obvious to the senses. The goats of Coretas approached a cavern on the hill of Parnassus. They fell into strange agitations, and made an unusual noise. The shepherd followed them, and as soon as he came near enough to receive the influence of the subterranean inspiring blast, he began to be agitated like his goats, and to prophecy like them; for we may believe, as reasonably as any part of the story, that the only difference consisted in this, his language was understood, that of his goats was not. On this experience was the Temple built, and the famous oracle established at Delphi, "commune humani generis oraculum," as Livy calls it. The Pythian priestess sat on a tripod, lest she should fall into the cavern when her head began to turn, and from thence she uttered with prophetic fury the inspirations she received, not from above, but from below. Many other examples might be brought of such physical inspirations, but this one is sufficient for my present purpose; at least it will be fully so when I have added, that they maintained their credit so well, and so long, even among philosophers, that Tully introduces his brother who was a zealous Stoician, as a person entirely convinced of their reality. So convinced he appears, that when an objection taken from the disrepute into which this oracle began to fall, is opposed to the argument he had drawn from its universal reputation, Quintus thinks it sufficient to answer on this physical principle, that the inspiring virtue of the earth which used to excite and enlighten the mind of the Pythoness, might be worn out by age, as rivers have been seen to dry up, or to change their course.*

But this was not the sole, though it might be the first notion

* —— otest vis illa terræ quæ mentem Pythiæ divino afflatu concitabat evanuisse vetustate, ut quosdam evanuisse amnes aut in alium cursum contortos et deflexos videmus.—*De Divin.* I, i.

of a divine inspiration. Hesiod, and your Homer, and others more ancient than either, had filled the world with demons and genii: and as poets were the philosophers of those ages among the Greeks, the machinery of poetry came soon to be that of philosophy. Plato, as great a poet as any of them in the garb of a philosopher, multiplied vastly these imaginary beings, and assigned them different ranks and different employments. He made the system of an intellectual world, and, in the respect I am going to mention, as absurdly as many others, but more reverentially toward the Supreme Being. He supposed a chain of intermediate beings from man up to God; and it is evident that these beings were in his system the agents of the Supreme Being, both in the creation and government of the world. He did not raise up man to an immediate communication with God. The distance and the disproportion seemed to him too great. He supposed him influenced, that is excited and restrained, enlightened and inspired, as well as made, by other created beings, by whom this distance was nearly at least filled up, and this disproportion gradually lessened. In his system, therefore, a greater reverence was shown to the Supreme Being than in those of some other theologians, in which God confers familiarly with men, and acts a part, not only in the most important, but in the most trifling scenes of our human farce. But still the absurdity remained of such a gradation of beings. That there is a gradation, I doubt not, upwards, as our senses inform us that there is one downwards. But such a gradation, by which finite approaches nearer and nearer to infinite, is inconceivable. The distance and disproportion will be still infinite.

But to return, and to conclude what I shall say about the notions that obtained among the heathens on this subject; for you know that I have reserved to myself a right of following the matter as it rises before me, without observing in these essays, any more than I used to do in our conversation, a just proportion in the members of my discourse. The causes of inspiration then were principally these, an intoxicating wind or vapor that blew into the inspired persons, or the action of demons, or genii on their bodies, or in them. Such beings were believed universally to exist; for even Democritus, if I mistake not, is said to have admitted them. But they were believed to be material, though spiritual and invisible; and whether Plato thought them all good and beneficent or no, the general opinion, and that even of the latter Platonicians, held that some were good, and some bad, that there were pure and impure spirits. Their cotemporaries, the Christian fathers, affirmed that these spirits were all of the latter sort. They attributed the whole secret of oracles rather to the malice of the devil, than to the knavery of the priests. I have

read in Basnage,* I think, that Origen and Chrysostom represented the priestess sitting on a tripod over the sacred vent, with her legs wide open to receive the spirit, and that some pretended the oracles were delivered through this honorable channel. Nay, that judicious person, the martyr Justin, scrupled not to assure the world, that these devils had carnal enjoyment of girls and boys too, in the very act of inspiration. The general effect of inspiration was madness and fury. Divine madness and divine fury they were called, and the persons, thus inspired, uttered their vaticinations in fits that made the body swell, and become distorted by convulsive motions. In this state, and when they were quite out of their senses, they were consulted by men who thought themselves in theirs, who were often the greatest, and in public opinion the wisest of mankind. Tully† asks on what authority we are to believe that the madman sees what the wise man does not see, and that he who loses human sense acquires divine? His brother might have referred him for an answer to the works of his admired philosopher, to that passage in the Phædrus particularly where Plato recommends, so highly, that divine fury which exerts itself in vaticination, mystery, poetry and love, and where he gives the preference over all other wisdom to that which divine fury infuses.

Now nothing could resemble more a heathen than a Jewish vaticination; and no wonder is there that it should be so. Egypt and the east were the great schools of such philosophy and theology as I have mentioned. They abounded with seers of visions and dreamers of dreams, with prophets and diviners, with wizards and cunning men, with theurgic as well as natural magic, and all the occult sciences. The Greeks borrowed from hence almost all the knowledge, real and imaginary, that they had; and so did the Jews too, as some divines have had the candor to confess, whilst the crowd of them affect to maintain the contrary against irresistible probability, and would persuade us that the whole heathen world was enlightened by the lamp of the tabernacle; as if any similitude of opinions, customs, and rites, which is a good proof in general that the more modern learned of the more ancient nation, was equally good to prove that the more ancient learned of the more modern, the masters of the slaves, and a people that had a high opinion of themselves, of a people whom they despised. But however this may have been, the Jews, according to the spirit of the Mosaic system, made the Supreme Being more frequently an immediate actor in matters

* Antiq. Judaiques.

† Quid vero habet auctoritatis furor iste, quem divinum vocatis, ut quæ sapiens non videat, ea videat insanus, et is, qui humanos sensus amiserit, divinos assecutus sit?—*De Div.* l. 2.

of inspiration, as in all other matters, than the heathen did; though they too employed the ministry of angels, whose names, at least, they learned first from the Chaldeans, if they did not come first acquainted with these spiritual beings among that people in their captivity.

This notion of an immediate action of God on the human mind became more common, and inspiration more metaphysical in the Christian schools. Some of the heathen philosophers held opinions that led to this, and might have been improved, so as to derive all inspiration immediately from the Supreme Being in some extraordinary manner or other, which they would not have been at a loss to represent, or rather to evade the necessity of representing, by the help of figurative style. Some of them assumed that the human soul was drawn out of the divine nature, or was tinctured by it, or had caught its fire from it. I know not how to express better those strange words, strange I mean, in this application, *hausti* and *delibati*. They assumed further, that the divine mind pervaded and filled all things; and when they assumed thus much, it seemed easy to conclude, from this near relation of the divine and human mind, to an action of the former on the latter, "cognatione divinorum animorum animos humanos commoveri."*

Plato's trinity, as little intelligible as it was, might have been another assumption by which to account more particularly for this divine act of inspiration. The second person, God's intelligence, the word, made man: and what could be more consequential, than to ascribe all particular inspirations to the third person, that universal spirit, that energy of God, which animates and governs the whole? No part of this could have shocked the opinions of those philosophical theists, who acknowledged not only a general providence, but particular providences. As little could it have been thought repugnant to that principle which seemed common to them all, that principle of reverence to the one, the father of Gods and men, whom they conceived to be beyond and before all existence. They could conceive no being, nor manner of being, equal to the Supreme; but neither did the Platonic trinity suppose that there was any such: and they might have placed the source of inspiration, according to this theology, much higher than obvious, visible causes, and even than the suggestions of demons and genii, without ascribing it to the first mind, or admitting any mind equal to the first. They had the more reason to do this, and to place inspiration, as it were, out of sight, when the credit of oracles began to fail, and a gross physical account of it would pass no longer.

* Tully de Div.

But that which heathen theologers could do, Christian theologers could not, after the Nicæan council at least, whatever they did or might have done before it. They ascribed inspiration, indeed, to the Holy Ghost; but the three persons of this trinity making one God only, they ascribed inspiration to an immediate act of the Supreme Being, as the Jews had done before them, among whom this act, and the immediate presence of the Deity were said to be manifested often in a sensible manner. Something of this kind obtained at first among the Christians. Voices from heaven for instance, and the visible descent of the Holy Ghost, would have made inspiration, if these phenomena had continued, as much an object of sense in the Christian system, as it had been ever in that of the Jews or of the heathen. But these phenomena did not continue, and though signs and wonders were said to be wrought by persons inspired, inspiration became invisible, and the notion of it purely metaphysical; less absurd than former notions perhaps, but more remote too from human comprehension.

The consequence of all this was, that the proof of inspiration resting on authority and opinion, it became very equivocal.—Every sect and every council pretended to it; and, whilst they opposed and damned one another, what one side attributed to inspirations of the Holy Ghost, the other attributed to suggestions of the devil; for in this system the Holy Ghost, that is God himself, is the inspirer and comforter, and the devil, an inferior, a created spirit, and yet a rival to the Father of all spirits, is the tempter and tormentor. How God acts on the human mind to inspire and comfort, and the devil to tempt, was then, and is still a metaphysical or theological secret. But the power of tormenting which the devil exercised in those days, was no secret at all. Legions of impure spirits were believed to take often possession of the bodies of men, from whence nothing could drive them but aspersions of holy water, and other forms of ecclesiastical conjuration, performed by priests, that is, by men on whom the imposition of hands had conferred the Holy Ghost in a constant succession from the apostles. This conjuration had been first taught by Solomon, as Josephus asserts in the eighth book of his antiquities, and it continued long in credit, for much the same reasons that oracles and the arts of divination had done so formerly. It is kept in some use still by the Roman clergy, and our reformed clergy would not be sorry perhaps to revive this pious practice.

Whilst ignorance and superstition reigned triumphantly, and the fantastical ideas and notions which they communicate, and which authority, education, and habit do in some sort realise in the mind, spread and prevailed; men might be easily persuaded

that the spirit, or breath of God, which blew into the face of the first man, and made him a living creature,* might blow likewise on extraordinary occasions, and in an extraordinary manner, into the faces of some of his posterity, as into chosen vessels. They might be easily persuaded, that this breath was not only a principle of life to all, but an influencing, exciting, and enlightening principle to some. They might imagine without any great effort, that the effect of this occasional breath was to fan into a flame the latent sparks of a certain fire that had been kindled in the original constitution of man, and had been extinguished by the fall. They might imagine, that they knew really what all this meant, and on such reasonings, which would have been none of the worst they employed, they might have proved to themselves and others the inspiration of Christian saints, to whom sublime mysterious truths were revealed, and of Jewish prophets and seers, who foretold future events and recovered stolen goods; for even this, as low as it may seem, was a part of their employment, and one effect of their inspiration.

But this reign is well nigh over; or, if it continues in some of these parts of the world, it triumphs universally in none. He who pretends to instruct now must know first, and expect, if he uses any figure, to be called upon to explain his meaning; that is, to show this meaning without the veil of any figure. Inspiration was long understood in the literal sense of the word, not only whilst men imagined grossly that it was the effect of a subterranean wind or vapor, but when they had spiritualised it a little, and fancied it a breath that came from above, or a spirit that descended on one prophet, and passed from one to another with sensible effects. Since it could be received no longer in the literal sense, philosophers and divines have given up the literal sense, and kept the word that signified something, to serve as a figure that signifies nothing, and that can be translated into nothing but some other figure. Figures and types are indeed the strongest entrenchments of metaphysics and theology: and it is in them that the professors of these reputed sciences defend themselves the best.

An history of inspiration, like one of divination, would be a collection of such extravagances and absurdities, as might be sufficient to make our species forfeit the character of reasonable creatures, if it did not show at the same time that by a free use of their reason men have detected, one after another, most of the fallacies, the grossest at least, that had been imposed on them by Heathens, Jews, and Christians, for even of these it cannot be

* Inspiravit in faciem ejus spiraculum vitæ, et factus est homo in animam viventem, are the words of Moses.

denied. The fautors of inspiration are thus reduced to their last entrenchment; and having abandoned all their other posts as untenable, they endeavor to defend this by not explaining what has been refuted as often as any explanation of it has been attempted. Your friend, Atterbury, who knew more of classical learning, and even of divinity, than he did of politics, though he affected these the most, has sometimes lamented that any explanations of the real presence in the eucharisty had been given, and that the church had made any decisions about it. As long as it was held an inexplicable mystery, it was believed, he said; but as soon as divines had been so unskilful as to attempt to explain it, Berenger's recantation signified nothing, and it has been a disputed point ever since. If this be a right notion, as I incline to think it is, these two mysteries, that of the real presence, and that of inspiration, have had very different fates. The first set out a mystery, and was piously believed, till attempts to explain it showed that it implied contradiction. The other set out as a natural phenomenon, and was so far from being thought a real mystery, how much soever it might remain such to the vulgar, that prophecy and divination, the effects of it, were thought attainable by purifications, purgations, and other physical methods, and that they became arts which were taught in the schools by the Heathens and the colleges of the Jews. But the notion of inspiration has ended in mystery where the other began: and this expedient, the only one that can support it at all, would support it effectually, if these ages resembled a little better those wherein the belief of the real presence was first established.

It may be said, that an extraordinary action of God in the human mind, which the word inspiration is now used to denote, is not more inconceivable than the ordinary action of mind on body, and of body on mind; and I confess that it is not. But yet the cases are so widely different, that no argument can be drawn from one in favor of the other. It is impossible to doubt of an action which is an object of intuitive knowledge, and whereof we are conscious every moment; and it is impertinent to deny the existence of any phenomenon merely because we cannot account for it. But then this phenomenon must be apparent, and the proof that it exists, or has existed, must be such as no reasonable man can refuse to admit. Otherwise we shall be exposed to make frequently the ridiculous figure that philosophers have sometimes made, when it has been discovered after they had reasoned long about a thing, that there was no such thing. We must not assume for truth, what can be proved neither *à priori* nor *à posteriori*. A mystery cannot be proved *à priori*, it would be no mystery if it could; and inspiration is

become a mystery, since all we know of it is, that it is an inexplicable action of the divine on the human mind. It would be silly, therefore, to assume it to be true, because God can act mysteriously, that is, in ways unknown to us, on his creature man: for just so Asgyll did prove, or might have proved, that men do not die, but are translated, because God can translate them. There is then no possibility of proving inspiration *à priori:* and the proofs that are brought *à posteriori*, for Christian inspiration, are not more decisive to Christians, than those which the Stoicians brought in favor of vaticination and divination were to them, nor than those which the Mahometans and the worshipers of Foe bring of the same kind are to them.

This word inspiration, about which I have said so much more than I intended, belongs properly to you sons of Apollo; and to you it should be of right restored. Whilst you were at once poets, prophets, philosophers, and divines, and went about from house to house singing, as the Methodists do preaching sublime doctrines, the use of it might be a little confused: and what you assumed in the two first characters, you might ascribe to yourselves and others in the two last. But since they are become distinct professions, as well as characters, and one of them, that of prophets, is extinct, inspiration may have its place and use in poetry; but no where else. If philosophers and divines employ this word, which signifies a particular and determinate action, as a figure to signify some other action, they employ it improperly. It cannot serve to inform; but it may serve, and it actually does serve, to deceive. Our Quakers, our Methodists, and enthusiasts of every sort and in every religion, are confirmed, by the received use of this word, in the belief that the spirit of God descends upon them, is inspired into them, excites and enlightens their minds, and enables them by its powerful operation to utter all the extravagances, which are in their opinion so many divine truths.

It is the more reasonable to guard against every thing of this kind, because the hypothesis of some of our finest modern writers on the subject of the human mind, though they do not pretend directly to be inspired, seem to renew and improve the reveries, or waking dreams of ancient philosophers, in such a manner as to lay again the foundations of superstition, by supposing an immediate and constant communication between the divine and the human natures. That Malebranche supposed such a communication, is evident in all his writings: and his Christian and metaphysical meditations are nothing less than a dialogue between the Word and him. The conference was not held indeed in the terms and form of the dialogue; but the language he makes

the Word to hold in it, he affirms to be conformable to the answers which he thinks he received when he interrogated the Word on the same subjects.

I have sometimes wondered that divines and metaphysicians, who have borrowed so many fantastical notions from Plato, have neglected one which they might have found in the Apology of Socrates, and by which they might have accounted more probably, and more decently than they have done, for divine inspirations, revelations, and communications. They might have learned there to distinguish between the ethereal and elementary body. We may compare the first to a shirt, since the same Plato compares the second in the Phædro to a suit of clothes, and since it is worn under the other, "sub manifesto hoc corpore latens." Now it was by this medium that Socrates was inspired by his demon, or guardian angel. He saw visions, and he heard voices, but how? Not by his elementary, but by his ethereal senses. Thus an inferior spirit, and not the Supreme Being, is the immediate actor; and inspiration is no longer an unmeaning figure of speech. But this is not enough for metaphysical divines. Our notions of humanity must be raised higher, even at the expense of debasing (for such it appears to me) our notions of the divinity. God and man must be more intimately joined, though by endeavoring so to join them, they renew, in some sort, the grossest absurdities of paganism.

Many instances might be produced of this sort, and some very flagrant. I will content myself in this place with the mention of one. Bayle observes, that the notion of seeing all things in the infinite Being, which father Malebranche advanced on this assumption, that our ideas must be in God, because they cannot be modifications of any created mind, differs little from the doctrine of Democritus,* who taught, that the images of objects, which present themselves to our senses, are emanations of God, nay that they are God, and that the idea in our minds is God likewise. The observation is certainly just, and I need not enlarge upon it to show you that it is so. Instead of that, I will ask you whether the different hypothesis of a philosopher, whom you and I love and honor, has not some, though a more remote resemblance to the same doctrine? Both of them at least have, in

* The words of Tully are these: "Democritus, qui tum imagines earumque circuitus in deorum numero refert: tum illam naturam quæ imagines fundit ac mittat: tum scientiam intelligentiamque." They will be better translated thus: Democritus, who places among the gods not only the images of the objects that surround and strike us, but that nature which pours forth and sends these images to us, and knowledge and intelligence. Cotta mentions the same notions afterwards, not in the same words as Velleius, but to the same effect.—Tully *de Nat. Deor.* l. 1.

my opinion, one common tendency, that which I have just now mentioned. If I was perfectly persuaded, as I am very much of the contrary, that we perceive all our ideas in the divine mind, I could account for all that is attributed to inspiration by a figure, that would have a sort of metaphysical meaning. I could represent the soul as a mirror, and it has been so represented, I think, by some, and then suppose, that images received from the presence of God to it, are reflected by it, which would be like the reflected light of the sun, a secondary and fainter, but a divine illumination. Again, could I comprehend that visual language in which "the Author of nature constantly speaks to the eyes of all mankind;" I might be able perhaps to comprehend how God may speak to prophets and apostles in visions, or else I might deduce by analogy, that as we think we see when we do not really see, but only receive ideas through the eye from an immediate action of God, so prophets and apostles might think that they employed the faculties of their own excited and illuminated minds, and signified their own thoughts by the words they pronounced, when they neither thought nor spoke, but when the breath of God articulated in their organs. I might be able to comprehend such sublime notions, and I should be glad, no doubt, to find how happily these doctrines coincide with that ancient opinion, that prophets prophesied often without knowing that they did so. But, I confess, that I comprehend as little our friend's hypothesis as I do that of the father of the oratory; though I comprehend very clearly how we may be said in some sort, and in some particular cases, to learn to see; that is, by the ordinary course of experience, and not by any divine agency.

Shall I own it? I cannot be mortified at my want of comprehension in this case. When philosophers employ clear and determinate ideas, such as are real not fantastic, and when they reason on principles that are evidently true, instead of such as are doubtful at best, I comprehend them without any extreme labor of mind. When they do otherwise, I misspend no time in making unprofitable efforts to comprehend them. Cotta treats the notions of Democritus that have been mentioned with the utmost contempt, and even Velleius had entered into no refutation of them. Bayle thinks a little genius could never form them, and that in order to form them a man must comprehend the whole extent of power, which belongs to a nature capable of painting in our minds the images of objects. I will imitate in all similar cases the old academician, not the modern sceptic, who seems a dogmatist on this occasion. I will follow no man out of the high road of plain common sense. In that, the philosopher may lead me to all real knowledge; for common sense does not exclude uncommon discoveries in the search of truth. But the philoso-

pher goes often out of this road, whilst the illiterate, unthinking crowd of mankind cannot go far in it. These are the two extremes in which men sometimes meet. The difference consists always in their acquisitions and habits, and not always in their natural faculties. The reason of one is not cultivated like that of the other; but the imaginations of both may be apt to warm and transport them alike. Whilst the philosopher consults his reason alone, he will be always far before the other. But if his imagination carries him away, there is a chance that they may meet, and the philosopher, with all his knowledge, and all his reason, may have not his own whimsies alone, but those of the most vulgar understandings to support.

SECTION VI.

Having dwelt thus long on one art of the mind that degenerates into artifice, it is time I should proceed to another; and the art to be considered next, is that which was intended when I said, that we are sometimes obliged to pay in counters for want of ready money. What I mean by it is this. We are sometimes obliged in philosophical, as well as in common discourse, to make use of words that have no determinate, nor indeed, properly, any ideas or notions at all annexed to them. I say we are obliged to do so, in order to distinguish this case from that of metaphysics and theology, which are almost wholly conversant, when they keep within their own bounds, and go neither into physics nor ethics, about words that have no intelligible meaning, words that have been invented to conceal ignorance, and to create an appearance of science: whereas the words intended here, though they have no ideas nor notions, properly speaking, annexed to them, have however a meaning and a use, an intelligible meaning and a good use. Two of them I will produce as examples, and they shall be words that serve to denote unknown causes of known effects. They take their precision, like the names of substances, from sensible effects, and they refer either to an unknown real cause, or to the unknown principle of some apparent cause.

Our ignorance of causes, our curiosity, and the extravagant opinions of philosophers about them, are equally great. I shall not enter on that subject here at least. Something, however, must be said about the notion of cause, in order to show the reason, and even necessity of employing such words as I have mentioned, and to introduce what I propose to say concerning the use and abuse of them. Neglecting, therefore, all the abstract notions that are entertained about cause, the nice and tri-

fling distinctions between the cause and the sufficient reason of any thing, and the other distinctions, as well as divisions, and subdivisions that have been made, and that serve, for the most part, to no other purpose than to perplex us in a labyrinth of words, let us content ourselves to understand when we speak of cause in general, "That, by the immediate, or remote, the physical, or moral virtue whereof any thing is what it is, or any thing is done as it is done."

The Supreme Being is the first, and, strictly, the sole efficient cause. But as we know nothing of his manner of being, so we know nothing of his manner of causing. In your Homer's machinery the gods are perpetually actors, but the poet neither employs them so much, nor more improperly, nor more unworthily than philosophers and divines have presumed to employ the Deity. Let us think with greater reverence of God, and whilst we acknowledge him to be the first, let us not imagine him to be the immediate cause of every phenomenon and every thing that happens. Through how many mediums, if I may say so, may not the rays of divine efficacy pass before they arrive at us! Far be it from me to neglect or to discourage the contemplation of the first efficient cause who shines so gloriously in all his works. But let us adore him in the contemplation of his works, and of the order of second causes by which the system of them is maintained and carried on. Second causes cannot be reckoned in a strict philosophical sense efficient, when they are considered relatively to the whole extent of being, at the head of which is God. But as they have a communicated efficiency in such degrees, of such kinds, and under such directions as it is communicated to them by infinite wisdom and power, they appear efficient when they are considered relatively to us, and to our system: and since all our knowledge is in truth relative to these, we may be well content to admit ideas that are so too, and that reach no further. These are our limits, and where our experimental knowledge of second causes stops, there our physical inquiries should stop. All beyond is metaphysical jargon; for at what point soever we leave physics for metaphysics, we fall of course into jargon. The ancients generally set out in it. The moderns too often conclude in it.

The first example I shall produce of words that serve to denote unknown causes of known effects, shall be the word chance. Every event that happens in the course of human affairs, how contingent soever it may seem, has a real and peculiar cause. But when these causes are too remote, or too complicated, to be easily or at all discerned by us, we call the event contingent, and the cause chance. Thus we endeavor to supply our want of ideas, to think with less confusion, to discourse more

intelligibly, and to make up the sum with counters which we cannot make up with money. But in this kind of payment there has been much abuse, and much deceit. Superstition attempted to make these counters pass for real money; and, instead of keeping the word chance to signify in its application nothing more than this, that the cause of an event was unknown, to make it pass for an actual cause and a positive Being. Superstition impersonated it under the name of fortune: and this chimerical divinity was supposed to direct arbitrarily all the events whose causes were not apparent, or which exceeded in good or ill the expectations of men. The heathens accounted by it for past events, consulted it about future, and referred themselves to it in doubtful cases.

It is strange that such superstitions, instead of being confined to the heathen world, should have been as prevalent among God's chosen people, both Jews and Christians, and should be scarce exploded at this hour. It is stranger still that a recourse to the decision of chance should be expressly commanded in the Old Testament, and occasionally countenanced in the New, even on so important an occasion as the election of an apostle in the place of Judas Iscariot. Yet so it is; and from hence we may believe it happened that some even of the most puerile and absurd appeals to chance, if one can be more so than another, were long preserved among Christians, and by them applied most profanely and cruelly. Many different Sortes or chances were consulted by the heathen. Those of Præneste, where Fortune had a temple adorned with Mosaic work by Sylla, who trusted much to the goddess, and took the name of Fœlix, on account of his success which he ascribed to her, were extremely famous. I do not remember how these consultations were made; but those that had the name of Sortes Homericæ, and Sortes Virgilianæ, were made by dipping at random on some passage in the poems of Homer and Virgil, and the superstition was sure to be confirmed whenever, as it could not but happen often, future events seemed in any degree to have been figured in these passages. An odd instance of this which is preserved in a tradition derived, I think, from Mr. Cowley, I may mention as I go along. This poet and some other persons, attached to Charles the First, were with him in the isle of Wight where Cromwell kept him in prison till he brought him to the block. Their amusement, for it could be nothing more, was to try the Sortes Virgilianæ; and in trying them it is reported, that the unfortunate prince dipped on those terrible imprecations that Dido makes against Æneas and his posterity, in the fourth book of the Æneid.

I said that these superstitious usages have been applied profanely and cruelly, by Christians: and I was in the right to say so. What could be more profane than the practice of opening the sacred books, in order to take from the first passage that occurred a prognostic of events, and to degrade them to the same silly use that the heathens made of their poems? What could be more cruel than the custom of deciding causes criminal and civil too, by duels, which was introduced by the barbarous northern nations; and was, notwithstanding the declarations of some popes against it, so far approved by the church, that it was followed on many occasions in ecclesiastical controversies, and that it was accompanied on all occasions with much ecclesiastical ceremony, even so far that a priest blessed in the field the weapons of the champions? This trial, like that of passing blindfold over red-hot ploughshares, and others, were appeals to chance as to a judge: and both these appeals, and the consultations of chance about future events, were founded on a theological axiom invented to excuse them on one hand, and to create more reverence for them on the other, that God presides over chance, and directs it by interpositions of his providence; so that to interrogate chance was to interrogate God, and the decisions of chance were the decisions of God.

To apply the word chance in this manner, was absurd enough. But what shall we say of those philosophers who ascribed the creation of the world to chance. Superstition perverted this innocent art of the mind: and a word, that signified no determinate cause at all, was made to signify a Superior Being who governs the affairs of the world, and to whose agency those events were to be ascribed that could not be accounted for otherwise. Philosophy, the philosophy of men who affected to put superstition under their feet, and to account by physical researches for all the phenomena, attributed the original of all things to chance. By this proceeding the Epicureans did not endeavor to screen their ignorance, but they pretended to show their knowledge of causes. They erected chance into a first physical cause, and derived the production of the universe from it. They assumed a chaos of innumerable heterogeneous particles, endowed with essential activity, and with whatever else was necessary for their purpose, like the declination of these atoms; after which they concluded that such a number of entities in perpetual motion and action one on another, must pass sooner or later through all possible combinations. From hence they concluded again, that the formation of the world was caused by a certain concourse, or combination of atoms, without the unnecessary help of a directing mind; and that this concourse being fortuitous, the world was made by chance. But enough has been said of the use and

abuse of this word. It is time to speak of those that have been made of the word force.

Since even Alciphron the minute philosopher could frame no precise idea of force, though he "shut his eyes to assist his meditation," it might well be asked how it comes to pass, that there are so many refined subtleties and nice distinctions about this same force? Ingenious and learned men might have employed their time much better most certainly, than they have done about "subtle abstracts, spiritual quintessences, un certo che and un non so che." I am sorry to have this proof the more of the folly and affectation of philosophers. But I am not at all at a loss to account for them, nor to show from whence the difference arises between these visionaries, and those great men who have discoursed rationally about force. The difference arises plainly from hence. The former have abused this art of the mind, and supposed, or reasoned as if they supposed, that this word signified what common sense never meant to signify by it. The others have not turned art into artifice in this manner, but have reasoned about force as about the unknown cause of sensible effects, or the unknown causality of apparent causes. It may seem strange perhaps to our first thoughts, that men should talk sense, for it will never seem strange that they should talk nonsense, about something whereof they have no ideas. But the reason why they do so in the instance before us, will appear to our second thoughts extremely plain. That it may appear so the more, and that we may show the better how industrious the mind is to help its natural infirmities by art in the conceptions and expressions of things, let me add a few reflections to what has been already observed.

Without meaning what those philosophers meant who screened so much ignorance behind the notions they endeavored to establish of occult qualities and occult causes, we may say that the causality of apparent causes, and therefore the first efficient causes in the order of second causes will be always occult, whatever hypothesis or system we follow. The Peripatetics and schoolmen imagined the qualities of substances, as they were and are still called, and which are supposed to excite ideas immediately by their immediate action on our organs, and mediately by their action on other bodies, to be real entities derived from substantial forms, inherent in substances somehow or other; but distinct from them, and added to them. Modern philosophers, more intelligibly and more conformably to experience, have banished all these notions of qualities distinct from body, and have taught us that the action of body on body is produced exclusively of them by the inward constitution of body itself, and is varied according to the divers constitutions of the bodies that are at any

time passive, and the different states they are in. This opinion leads us on to observe the mechanism of body, the laws of motion, and whatever else makes any part of physical inquiry. The other is founded in abstract general notions, which the knowledge of particulars had little share in framing, and points up to the chimeras of imagination. But still, even the best of them stops short of the real essences of substances, shows us more causes, but shows us as little the principles of their causality.

Although the system of philosophy be in this respect totally changed, yet the mind has found it convenient to preserve the notion of sensible qualities. They were thought real, and referred to substances as inherent specifically in them. They are conceived now to be qualities by imputation only, and refer to the manner in which our senses are affected. We cannot say with strict propriety, this clock has several sensible qualities, though it marks the days of the month to our sight alone, and the hours and the minutes to our eyes and to our ears. We know that there are no such distinct qualities in the clock, and that all these effects are produced by one spring, governed and producing effects according to its own temper, according to laws and directions resulting from the structure of the whole machine, and according to the texture and state of the organs of those to whom it is visible, or audible. Just so we cannot say with strict propriety, that snow is cold by a cold quality, any more than white by a white quality; or that fire is hot by a hot quality. They excite ideas that we distinguish and mark by these words; but they contain nothing in them that resembles these ideas. By the perceptions we have of these ideas, we mark, under the name of qualities, the divers effects of the unknown essences of substances.

This modern expedient (for the mind invents expedients as fast as it finds the want of them in the improvement, or more easy improvement of knowledge) is the more reasonably employed on another account. Though there are no such distinct specific qualities in bodies as were assumed by philosophers, yet the particles which compose bodies are often heterogeneous, as they appear by sure experiments; among other instances in that of light, and in the production of colors. Now this heterogeneity, which is thought to consist in the different sizes of the particles, and which may consist in other differences undiscoverable by us, continuing the same, and each kind acting and being acted upon according to its kind, this amounts in some manner to a notion of qualities contained in bodies; and being so conceived, the mind knows no more indeed of the real constitutions of bodies than it knew before, but proceeds in this hypothetical manner a little better and with greater clearness and precision in the pur-

suit of physical inquiries. These inquiries thus assisted enable us to analyse the component particles of bodies in their effects, and to discover in them too some general laws by which the action of these component particles separately and collectively is directed. This is some knowledge, and has the appearance of being greater than it is. But there is something still behind, concerning which we cannot boast even the least appearance of knowledge. Body acts on body by contact and pulsion. This is certain, though it be not so certain that body can act no other way, as philosophers generally assume. But even this pulsion is caused by motion, as motion is caused by pulsion; so that we get thus into a circle, and may go eternally round in the dark, without being nearer to discover what it is that puts mobility, that essential property of matter or body, into action, unless we suppose that the motion impressed originally continues still without any diminution. Who can doubt that there is attraction or gravitation and repulsion in body, as well as pulsion? Who can withhold his admiration from those discoveries that modern philosophy has made concerning the laws of motion, the properties of bodies that become apparent by them, and the actions of bodies on bodies that follow according to them? But who can or will ever be able to say what the springs of corporeal nature are, without which there could be neither action nor motion? What is that spring, for instance, which emits from the body of the sun innumerable particles of light, that make their passage of fifty millions of miles to our earth in seven minutes of time, or thereabouts, with a velocity inconceivable though demonstrated? Well may the cause be incomprehensible, when the effect passes comprehension.

Here now the word force, of which we are to speak, comes into play, and serves as a sign of the unknown causes of the phenomena, both of nature and of art; for effects are produced in the works of art by an imitation of those of nature, whereof the causes are unknown even to the artificer. When we employ the word alone, it is of very vague signification, and imports nothing more than some determining power intellectual or corporeal. But the mind takes two methods to give it greater precision, when that is necessary. We annex it sometimes to words which signify that whereof we would, on such occasions, denote the power in general to produce effects in physics, in mechanics, in ethics; and thus we say the force of wind, the force of a mill, or the force of habit. We annex at other times to it words that, referring to particular known effects, serve to fix on every occasion the meaning of it; just as we annex the words hot or cold, to signify certain supposed qualities of body, and as intelligibly at least as we use the names of substances. Thus we speak of

attractive, repelling, impelling force, of the force of gravitation, of cohesion, and even of inactivity. Our Newton, who has opened, by the help of these sure guides experiment and geometry, so large a field of knowledge and inquiry to present and future philosophers concerning the greatest and the least phenomena of nature, was far from pretending to determine the efficient cause of his attraction, or what that force is which makes bodies, and every particle of body, mutually tend to one another, and thereby give us an idea of attracting according to what has been taken notice of already. He distinguished so carefully between the particular attractions of the schools, and his meaning in the use of this word, that nothing could be more despicable than the ignorance or malice of those who would have confounded them, and have made him an asserter of occult qualities, who discovered the most universal and the least occult quality, if I may have leave to call it so for once, that ever was, since it intercedes the whole corporeal system. To this, and to the several kinds of it, he referred all the phenomena that cannot be accounted for by impulse, and they are many, though many of those which were ascribed to a sort of attraction by the ancients are on better foundations ascribed to impulse by the moderns. But neither for the cause of impulse, nor of attraction, nor of any action of body even the most sensible, can philosophy account. They, therefore, who use the word force as the sign of an unknown cause, whilst they apply themselves solely to discover the laws by which this cause acts, and the effects it produces, make a proper use of the word. They who affect to talk in any other manner, either physical or metaphysical, about force, abuse the word most impertinently, and pervert into artifice a very useful art of the mind.

But this is not the only method by which this art of the mind is perverted. It degenerates into artifice likewise, by the use which they make of it, who invent words to point out causes, they suppose unknown, of effects whose real causes are known. In the former method men are led into error, by affecting knowledge; in this, by affecting ignorance. Whatever force is, it is the cause of effects that are known, but cannot be ascribed to any cause that is known. In this the propriety of the word consists; for if they could be ascribed to any cause known and denominated, it would be improper, and the use of it could only serve to mislead. But there may be more than error, there may be fraud in this case; for, to borrow an image from the application of the word chance, the fair gamester who should see a raffle of sixes thrown several times together might ascribe it to chance, that is to an unknown cause, very properly; but the sharper, who had loaded the dice, or who knew that they were

loaded, would ascribe it to chance fraudulently as well as improperly.

I could wish that Alciphron and Lysicles had made this observation to Euphranor, and had applied it to show him why they admitted the word force, and rejected the word grace. The task would not have been hard, since it would not have been hard to show him real causes sufficiently known, and sufficiently marked by words, of the effects ascribed by him to a cause supposed unknown, and marked by a distinct word appropriated to this purpose. They might have shown these causes to be the influence of a religious education, a warm head, and a warmer heart; hope, fear, grief, joy, strong passions turned by prejudice and habit to devotion; devotion itself nursing its own principles, the effect in its turn becoming a cause uniform and constant, or redoubling its force on the least failure, in acts of attrition, contrition, mortification and repentance. They might have proved, not only by probable reasons, but by indubitable facts, the sufficiency of these and other known causes to produce all the effects commonly ascribed to grace, even the most astonishing that ever appeared in saints, confessors, or martyrs. Nay, they might have shown that effects more astonishing, and many of them better vouched than most of these, have been and are still daily produced in men, whom it would be blasphemous to repute under the divine influence. Alciphron might have illustrated this argument in his serious character, by quoting the saints, confessors, and martyrs of idolatry and heresy; and Lysicles in his gayer character, by quoting those of atheism, and of the most abominable vices as well as the most indifferent customs, of pæderasty for instance, and of long beards.

I am thinking what Euphranor would have replied to the minute philosophers, and can discover no reply worthy of that solidity and that candor which render him equally admirable and amiable. He might have said indeed that he was misunderstood by them, that the parity he insisted on was not meant to "consist in a proof of grace, as well as force from the effects; that it was only meant to answer an objection against the doctrine of grace, supposing it proved from revelation, and not to prove its existence; that therefore if the parity was sufficient to prove the possibility of believing grace without an idea of it, the objection they had made was answered, and he aimed at no more." But I think that, as minute philosophers as I am willing to allow Alciphron and Lysicles to have been, they would have maintained very easily the pertinence of their objection, and the insufficiency of Euphranor's answer.

They might have said, there is not even the parity you now suppose between force and grace. Our objection against the

latter did, in effect, anticipate your reply: and if we allowed your reply to be a good one, it would neither strengthen your cause, nor weaken ours. The parity between force and grace, which you confine now to a possibility of believing one as well as the other, is not sufficient; because it is not real. The possibility of believing force is nothing more than the possibility of believing that every effect has a cause, though the cause be unknown to us, and the propriety of the word consists in the application of it to no other cause. The disparity and impropriety do not arise from our having no idea of grace, for it is true that we have none of force; but they arise from hence, that there is not the same possibility of believing a cause whereof we have no idea, and which cannot be ascertained by its effects, as there is of believing one whereof we have no idea indeed, but which may be ascertained by its effects. You assume grace as a cause of one particular kind, an immediate influence of God on the mind, and you apply it to effects that may have causes of several kinds. Should a word be invented to signify a moral cause of effects purely physical, or a physical cause of effects purely moral, you would laugh at the invention, and you would be in the right. But is it a jot less ridiculous to assign a particular cause, either natural or supernatural, of effects that may be produced by any or all of these, and to think to save the absurdity by saying, that the word invented to denote this cause has no idea attached to it, no more than that of force?

The use of the word force can have no equivocal consequence, the use of the word grace may. The testimony, nay the conviction of men that they felt the influence of this unknown cause, would not take off the equivocation. How should it, after all the examples that may be brought from daily experience? A real enthusiast doubts no more of his perceptions of the operations of grace informing his mind and determining his will, than he doubts of his perceptions of the action of outward objects on his senses, and perhaps less.

Another thing, which I imagine that the minute philosophers would have said to Euphranor, is this. Since the parity you endeavor to establish between force and grace cannot be so established as to answer your purpose on any principles of reason; it remains, that the notion of grace cannot be received, nor the word employed on any other authority, than that of implicit faith in the revelation by which you suppose the existence of grace proved. That authority obliges us to believe an action or an influence of God on his elect, the manner of which no human idea can reach. But on what authority, Euphranor, do you answer our "objection against the doctrine of grace, by supposing it proved by revelation?" If you have proved this fact, that the

Christian revelation, in which the doctrine of grace is contained, was made by God to mankind, as all facts and especially one of this importance ought to be proved, for every other kind of proof proves nothing, we will agree, though there be not the same reason for admitting grace as for admitting force, that both are to be received alike. Our objection was insufficient, but your answer then was unnecessary; for surely nothing can be more unnecessary than to go about to establish on probable arguments what is already established on demonstration: and the real existence of grace has been already demonstrated, if the truth of the revelation, in every part of it, has been so; since no proposition can be more demonstrated than this, that a doctrine taught by infinite wisdom and truth is a true doctrine. If you have not proved this fact, and we think you have scarce attempted it by the proper proofs, your argument is a pure sophism. When we urge that the doctrine of grace, or any other Christian doctrine, is inconceivable, or that it is pregnant with absurd consequences, and therefore unworthy of God; this is urged in strictness, *ex abundantiâ;* for we do not give up the fundamental point, which is, that the authenticity of your Scriptures, in the whole and in every part of them, and the truth by consequence of your revelation, has not been yet proved. When you suppose the contrary, therefore, in disputing with us, you beg the question about a principle, in order to confirm a consequence. Thus it seems to me, that the dispute between Euphranor and the minute philosophers would have ended. What I have said upon it can be scarce called a digression; since this comparison of force and grace serves admirably well to exemplify what has been said concerning the art and artifice of the mind in the proper and improper use of words, to which no determinate ideas are annexed.

SECTION VII.

Many other arts there are by which the human mind endeavors to help itself in the acquisition and communication of knowledge. Some of them are as liable to abuse as these which have been mentioned, and all of them are abused more or less, to the production and propagation of error; for I presume, from what I have the means of observing, that this would be found true, on a strict examination, even in the applications of geometrical knowledge. But it is time I should put an end to this essay, that becomes a treatise in bulk at least, if not in matter nor method. That I may not conclude too abruptly, however, even for such a rambling essay; it is necessary I should proceed to distinguish, in a few more instances, between real and imagi-

nary knowledge, the natural powers and the arts, the arts and the artifices of the human mind: and if these instances should lead me further than I intend, you will please to ascribe this prolixity to my love of truth, and to my desire of giving you all the satisfaction I can.

I will observe, therefore, that as the sagacity of the mind has invented various arts whereby to improve the other faculties and even itself, and to carry their united forces a little further than the immediate lessons of nature carry them; so the affections of the mind have not only turned these arts frequently into artifice, an example or two of which we have seen, but have gone further. They have not only slid imperceptibly, but have plunged openly into artifice; and philosophers, those that I intend here, seem to acquire knowledge only as a necessary step to error: when they have done this, when they have lost sight of the former, they grow so fond of the latter, that they esteem it no longer a human, but raise it, by an imaginary apotheosis, up to a divine science; which is, of all others, the most pernicious artifice of the mind, according to my Lord Bacon, and according to truth. "Pessima res est errorum apotheosis, et pro peste intellectûs habenda est si vanis accedat veneratio."

Are these lovers of wisdom, these searchers of truth, you may well ask, nothing better than venders of false wares, venders of hypothetical systems at best, and often of such as are entirely fantastical? I fear that they are: and that the only excuse to be made for them is, that they sometimes deceive themselves first. They put me in mind of a passage in Plutarch, who compares the Stoics to ships that set out under auspicious names, the Success or the Swiftsure for instance, and who are beaten by tempests in their voyage, or cast away. The great mischief is, that the implicit passenger shares the fate of the unwary mariner. In short, so it is: the most irrational of all proceedings pass for the utmost efforts of human reason; and that philosophy, which pretends to teach us the sublimest truths, serves only to amuse mankind in a middle or low region between truth and error, knowledge and ignorance.

Let us now resume the division of our ideas into such as are natural and such as are artificial. Those of the first sort are such as God appointed them to be, and are, therefore, real human ideas. Those of the second are framed by the mind, sometimes under the direction of judgment, and sometimes under the prevalent influence of imagination, and are accordingly sometimes real and sometimes fantastic. Real ideas are defined, by Mr. Locke, to be "such as have a foundation in nature, a conformity with the real being and existence of things, or with their archetypes." Fantastical ideas then are such as have not this foundation, nor

this conformity. Now this definition requires a little commentary to make it more clear, and more exact too, if I mistake not, in one part of it at least.

Our simple ideas are all real, whether they be ideas of the primary or of the secondary qualities of bodies, as some philosophers speak: or, as I had rather say, whether they be such as all body excites in us, like those of extension, solidity, figure, divisibility and mobility; or whether they be such as particular bodies excite in us, like those of colors, sounds, smells, tastes, and the whole tribe of tangible qualities. But in our complex ideas of substances, the case is not the same. They must be real as long as they are conformable to the combinations of simple ideas that exist in the substances which cause them. But they are liable to become fantastical, because it is in the power of the mind to form them without any regard to existence, and because their reality neither is nor can be founded in any thing but real existence actual or past. The reason of this, which Mr. Locke gives where he treats of the reality of human knowledge, is so obvious that a very little reflection must suggest it to every thinking man, in the present state of philosophy. The real constitutions of substances being entirely unknown, it is as impossible we should know which of the powers that cause our simple ideas can co-exist, and which cannot, any other way than by experience, as it is that we should know what these powers are. Whenever we frame ideas, therefore, of substances, without being authorised by existence, these complex ideas must needs be fantastical; since they are composed of simple ideas proceeding from powers whose co-existence is, for aught we know, impossible. As obvious and as decisive as this reason is, it has not hindered men from exercising, even on substances, the power by which they boast themselves able to frame ideas of what may exist, as well as of what does exist, or has existed. Thus Plato and others, both before and since his time, have peopled invisible worlds with so much poetical license, that one is tempted to think of him, who seems to have been above the lowness of superstition, that he was very little in earnest, and meant rather to amuse than instruct an age wherein the marvellous was sure to please.

It is the abuse and misapplication of this power, that has opened an inexhaustible source of fantastical ideas and notions, which have been the bane of philosophy, and have infected almost every branch of science. The proofs are innumerable; and the instances that may be produced are liable neither to objection nor evasion among men who join candor with knowledge; two qualifications that are inseparable from the love of truth; that promote one another in the discovery of it; that should

always go together, and scarcely ever do so. Fantastical ideas and notions of every conceivable kind, and even of substances immortal and mortal, celestial and infernal, divine and human, or amphibious beings that partake of the two natures, stare us in the face whenever we look into the histories, traditions and philosophical remains that are come down to us from the remotest antiquity. The same phenomena appear in all those of the intervening ages: and, to say the truth, science, or rather that which passed for science, in many of these, was composed of little else. In these latter ages, even since the resurrection of letters, since the improvement of philosophy and of human reason, several ideas and notions that were principles of imaginary knowledge to the ancients have been preserved in esteem and veneration: as if that, which had no foundation in nature three thousand years ago, could have acquired it since, and ideas which were fantastical in their minds, could ripen into reality in ours. They are not the less fantastical neither for having been purged of some circumstantial absurdities, and rendered a little more plausible by softenings and refinements. It must be confessed, that how deficient soever the ancient philosophers might be in real, they left scarcely any thing new to be invented in imaginary science. But they left much to be improved: and this task several of the moderns have executed most successfully. We may say of fantastical ideas in general, what Tully says of one kind of them, that of prognostications by dreams, at the close of his treatise on divination; that the solicitude and fear they cause would have fallen into contempt, if philosophers, who seemed to be perfect masters of reason, had not taken upon them to be protectors of dreams.

But these general reflections would be more seasonable after some that are more particular, and that remain to be made. As far as we have gone, we have seen our way, I think, very clearly: and the distinction between real and fantastical ideas of substances is so well established, that they cannot be easily confounded. The distinction agrees with one part of Mr. Locke's definition; and is founded in the same reason. But there is another part of this definition, which seems too inaccurately expressed in the chapter of real and fantastical ideas, and quite untrue, as well as a little inconsistent with what he advances elsewhere, according to the explanation of it in the chapter of the reality of knowledge. In the definition it is said, that our ideas are real when they have a conformity with their archetypes. In the explanation it is said, that "all our complex ideas, except those of substances, being archetypes of the mind's own making, not intended to be copies of any thing, nor referred to the existence of any thing, as to their originals, cannot want any con-

formity necessary to real knowledge." Conformity with what? With themselves? That meaning is too absurd to be supposed. With other ideas of what exists, or has existed? That cannot be intended neither; for these ideas are "not copies of any thing, nor refer to the existence of any thing as to their originals." It remains, therefore, that we understand no conformity whatsoever necessary to make these ideas real, when it is said that they want not any that is necessary to make them so. Now this proposition I think absolutely untrue. There is a conformity, in the strict sense of the word, though of another kind, as necessary to make these ideas real, as the conformity proper to our ideas of substances is necessary to make them real: and all the complex ideas here spoken of are real or fantastic, as they have or have not this conformity. Thus it will appear, if we do not suffer the word archetype to perplex our thoughts. If all our complex ideas, except those of substances, are archetypes, they must be applicable, and properly and really applicable, to something; for it is at least as fantastical to frame an archetype applicable to nothing that is really typified by it, as to frame the idea of a substance that can be referred to no real existence as to the archetype of it. When archetypes are made by nature, they determine our ideas, as God, the author of nature, has appointed that they should be determined: and the knowledge we acquire by them is real knowledge for us and to all human purposes, whether these ideas do really resemble their archetypes or not; according to what has been inculcated already, and perhaps more than once. But when complex ideas and notions are framed by the mind to serve as archetypes in it, they must be framed with a conformity to the same nature that determines the others, or they will be fantastical and produce no knowledge, or such as is fantastical like themselves. I do not say that they must be framed so as to contain nothing which implies contradiction. They have been so framed, indeed, as to imply it on many occasions, by ancient and modern sages and saints. But we will suppose, that they are so no longer: and on that supposition we say, that even this is not sufficient, and that all these ideas must have a closer conformity than that of bare possibility to what we know of the existence of things corporeal or intellectual. Universal possibility is the range of divine particular actuality, passed or present, and that in a very confined system of human intellect.

The ideas we speak of, it is said, are neither "intended to be copies of any thing, nor referred to the existence of any thing as to their originals." If this was absolutely true, all such ideas would be archetypes in a strict sense, and could be conceived no otherwise. But it is not absolutely true. It is rather a defini-

tion of fantastical, than of real ideas. Our most complex ideas and notions which combine in the greatest variety, modes and relations, as well as simple ideas, are often copies; they are often referred to existences, to particular existences, as to their originals: and when they are not so, when they are put together in the mind, as the mind never perceived them put together in existence, though this may be said to be done "by the free choice of the mind, and without considering any connection they have in nature," yet are they not, when they are real, quite arbitrary, nor quite void of reference to existence. Mr. Locke shall prove this for me. He says, that one of the ways by which we get these complex ideas of mixed modes is experience and observation of things themselves. In all these instances, then, the complex idea is derived from existence, and is a copy first, though it becomes an archetype afterwards. It is so in the example he brings, in that of seeing two men wrestle. It is so in a multitude of others, in all those that are real and of real use. Murder is as old as the human race, and theft as property. Shall we believe that men were lawgivers and moralists, before they were spectators of the actions of one another? Invention is another of the ways he mentions, in which, by a voluntary act of the mind, several simple ideas are put together in it, and the archetype precedes existence. But even in these cases, the combinations of ideas ascribed to the invention of the mind, are suggested to it by other combinations, as it would be easy to show in the example brought of printing: and though the mind cannot be said to copy, when it has no particular existence in view, yet must it be allowed to imitate, when it has in view not only its simple ideas, but divers combinations of them, derived immediately or remotely from what exists or has existed in the system of nature: and these it has in view always when the complex ideas and notions we frame are not purely fantastical. Those of parricide and sacrilege were framed perhaps by some men, for they were not by all, before either of these crimes had been committed; and so they might, without doing much honor to the boasted power of knowing *á priori* and independently of existence. The relation of father and son is added to the complex idea of murder in one: and as soon as one order of men and their property came to be reputed sacred, it required no superior intelligence to foresee that they might be robbed as well as other men. But the mathematician never saw a circle mathematically true, such as he describes, and whose properties he considers: neither did Tully ever see such an image of virtue as he proposes, and whose principles and effects are explained in his offices. Be it so. But the mathematician, who considers the properties of a circle, a square, or a rectangle, had observed the various terminations of exten-

sion before he turned mathematican, and the moralist had obseved, wherein the good and evil of society consists, and had framed, on what he observed, ideas and notions concerning virtue and vice, and the perfection of human nature before he wrote of ethics. The ideas and notions of both, to be productive of real knowledge, must be derived from existence, and referred back again to it.

According to Mr. Locke, our knowledge "concerning these ideas is real, and reaches things themselves; because we intend things no farther, than as they are conformable to our ideas." These ideas then, to be real, must reach things themselves; that is, they must be rightly abstracted from things that exist, and they must be applied to things, no farther than things are conformable to them. This now coincides enough with the opinion I advance. Our ideas are fantastic, and our knowledge imaginary, when the former are framed without a sufficient conformity to existence, and when they are applied to things to which they are not applicable; for as ideas and notions may be void of all reality in themselves, so may they become fantastical by a fantastical application.

The mistake about these complex ideas carries much resemblance to that which Mr. Locke exposes so justly about maxims or axioms. These have been reputed the principles of science, whereas they are in truth the result of it, when they are evident; and cannot pass therefore with any propriety for the *præcognita* and *præconcessa*, for which they have been vended in the schools. Just so the complex ideas we speak of are called archetypes; and men infatuate one another enough to imagine that there is a superior intellectual region, as it were, a region of ideas that are the principles of general scientifical knowledge, from whence particular knowledge is to be deduced, and by which it is to be controlled. Whereas in truth all our ideas and notions are fantastical, as all our maxims are false, when they are not founded in particular knowledge: when they are carried further than evidence, the criterion of truth, accompanies them; and above all, when they are repugnant, as philosophical and theological ideas and notions frequently are, to this very evidence and to our knowledge of things as they exist.

Something has been said concerning ideas and notions in a former part of this essay, that may seem to render what is here said about such as are fantastical the less necessary. But having occasion to speak of these, I choose rather to run the risk of repetition (usefully I hope to the great end of fixing the bounds of real knowledge) than not to bring into a fuller view this intellectual artifice, which has served to build up so much imaginary knowledge, at the expense of neglecting the other, and of

corrupting it in all its parts. It was by the means of fantastical ideas and notions that chemistry was turned into alchymy; astronomy into judicial astrology; physics, by which I understand the contemplation of mind as well as body, into theurgic and natural magic; and the religion of nature into various systems of plain, but almost blasphemous, doctrines of absurd mysteries and superstitious rites. All these effects proceeded from the vain philosophy of men more intent to imagine what may be, than to observe what is: and if we add to these such as have proceeded from fantastical notions of abstraction, upon which the tedious and impertinent subtilties of ontology are founded, we shall have before us very nearly the sum of all that learned error into which men have fallen by reasoning on fantastical ideas and notions in search of real: as if it was below the majesty of the human mind to seek for reality and truth out of itself: and as if our senses were given us only to excite our intellect, and not to inform it by experiment and observation.

The principal occasions, on which the mind exercises the artifice spoken of in framing ideas that are fantastical, may be reduced to these three. Philosophers invent hypothetical ideas and notions in order to erect on them such systems as cannot be erected on real ideas and notions, that is on ideas and notions that have a known foundation in nature. They treat of ideas and notions that are incomplete and inadequate, as if they were complete and adequate. They dogmatise on obscure and confused ideas and notions, as if they were clear and distinct. Let us produce in this essay one example at least of the first. Your patience and mine too may be worn out by that time: and the examples omitted now may be taken up at some other.

SECTION VIII.

I might have reckoned hypotheses among those arts of the mind that degenerate into artifice; for such they have been often. The greatest part of ancient philosophy, almost all except ethics, was nothing else: and to mention no other among the moderns, Des Cartes had much to answer for of this kind. His great reputation put hypotheses into fashion; and natural philosophy became a sort of physical romance. But this manner of imposing imaginary for real knowledge is over, whilst one more absurd remains in credit; and, whilst naturalists can slide no longer from art into artifice without being detected, metaphysicians set out in artifice, and they succeed. A hypothesis in physics can make its way now no faster nor no further than experience countenances and supports it. But in metaphysics it is otherwise.

Their hypotheses stand alone: they stand in the place of experimental knowledge, are not so much as deduced from it by a fair analogy, but are made independently of, and frequently in direct contradiction to it.

They who plead for hypotheses urge, not very unreasonably, that they may be of some use in the investigation of truth, whilst they are employed; and that they may serve to the same purpose, even when they are discovered to be false and are laid aside: as men who have missed their way give some instruction to others to find it. Besides which they do not so much as pretend that any hypothesis ought to be maintained, if a single phenomenon stands in direct opposition to it. I do not agree to this plea in the whole, but to the latter part of it entirely. By that, the criterion of hypotheses is established by the favorers of them: we take it as they give it; and this criterion in the physical world is real actual existence. The Copernican system, itself, stands on no other bottom. The Newtonian system of attraction stands on the same: and this bottom is grown so broad and so firm, that neither the jokes of foreign wits, nor the cavils of foreign philosophers, can shake it as far as sensible bodies and sensible distances are concerned. But at the same time they who presume to suppose it equally certain where insensible bodies, the *minima naturæ*, and insensible distances, are concerned, as some of our countrymen have done, presume too much; this application of it not having been yet enough confirmed: and they have been accordingly justly censured for raising too hastily a hypothesis into a system. With such precautions and under such restrictions, hypotheses can do no hurt, nor serve to propagate error. But then it is surely a ridiculous scene to observe how confidently some metaphysical philosophers, who show themselves extremely scrupulous about such hypotheses as I have mentioned, either admit on the authority of others, or publish on their own, not barely as hypotheses but as demonstrations, the wildest notions imaginable; notions that are founded on nothing known nor knowable, and that can be tried, therefore, by no criterion whatever.

I have spoken of physics and metaphysics sometimes in the usual style; but I am far from altering the opinion I have already owned, and cannot, therefore, acquiesce to the pretensions of those who, under the umbrage of a supposed science that considers general natures, essences, being in the abstract, and spirit or immaterial substance, would place themselves in a rank of philosophical precedence above those who consider corporeal nature in the several phenomena, and would control, what they neglect, particular experimental knowledge. As to the ontosophists, they are the lineal descendants of the schoolmen; and they deal like

their progenitors in little else than hard words and such abstract ideas and notions, as render our knowledge neither more distinct nor more extensive, but serve to perplex it and to envelope in their obscurity what is in itself very plain. I shall neglect them, therefore, as the rest even of the learned world appears to do. The example I am to produce, under this head of hypothetical ideas and notions, shall be taken from those philosophers who usurp and appropriate to themselves, as if it were their peculiar province, the doctrine of spirits and spiritual things; whereas pneumatics taken in this sense, if they are any thing, are as truly objects of physics, as pneumatics, taken in a more proper sense, for that branch of natural philosophy whose object is the air we breathe. This distinction, however, has been established; and by the help of it, whilst naturalists are not at liberty to make hypotheses that are not founded in some degree of experimental knowledge, and that are not liable to be controled by it in all their parts and in all their progress, metaphysicians are left at liberty to frame as many fantastical systems as they please on ideas and notions purely hypothetical, without any regard to this foundation, or this control, as we observed just now.

As soon as men began to reflect on their own nature, and on that of all the bodies which surrounded them, they could not fail to observe solidity, extension, figure, divisibility, and mobility, the most apparent properties of the body or matter. As little could they fail to observe the operations of their own minds, in which they had the perceptions of these ideas, and to frame ideas of thought, and of the several modes of thinking, particularly of that which has the power of beginning motion. None of these ideas were contained in their ideas of body, nor necessarily connected with them: and that of a power to begin motion, which they observed to be in the whole animal kind, and which they knew consciously to be the effect of thought, must strike them as a superior property to that of mobility, with which they had occasion to compare it every instant. Taking it for granted, then, that they knew, as soon as they began to philosophise, all the perceivable properties of matter, they concluded, that such things as could not be accounted for by these, were to be accounted for by the properties of some unperceivable or unperceived matter, or else by the properties of some other substance. The first assumption was that of the most ancient philosophers: the other was made much later, at least it was much later that extended and non-extended substance were plainly contradistinguished.

Thus the distinction of body and soul came to be made and established among almost all the philosophers. It would be tedious even to run over the confused notions that were entertained about

soul. It was fire; but a divine fire to some: it was air to others: a fifth element to others, "quintam quandam naturam,"* and therefore Aristotle called it by a new name *entelekia*, to signify a certain continued and perpetual motion. "Sic ipsum animum entelekian appellat novo nomine, quasi quandam continuatam motionem et perennem."† In a word, it was something, they knew not what, which they thought fit to call breath or spirit, for a reason obvious enough: and the notion of it answered philosophical purposes, in metaphysics, just as well as that of occult qualities answered them in physics. A vast profusion of souls followed. They were created by the exorbitant power of hypothesis as fast and as often as they were wanted. There was an universal soul common to the whole system of corporeal being, or a soul of the world; for the world was, in the imagination of some of the ancients, a great animal, and consisted, like the animals it contains, of a body and a soul. There were particular souls for celestial and terrestrial bodies, a soul of the sun, a soul of every star and planet, a vegetative soul for plants, a sensitive soul for other animals; and for man there was an ample provision of three, of the two last and of a rational soul, which was a participation of the Divine mind, or an emanation from it, or an infusion out of it.

If we descend from those times to our own, we shall find the same hypothesis maintained with a little less confusion of opinions, in more precise and uniform terms at least, but still as unintelligibly as ever. Spinoza, indeed, acknowledged but one substance, and that matter; as absurdly as others have acknowledged but one substance, and that spirit. On the principle of the former, the vegetative, the sensitive, and even the rational soul can be nothing else than matter differently fermented and subtilised in systems of it differently organised; for which opinion whatever is said, should be said, and might be said, without admitting the principle of Spinoza in its full extent; without supposing God a material being, from whence the most absurd consequences would follow, and without denying his existence, which would imply, if that be possible, more. But the general run of opinion assumes the soul to be a spiritual substance, and a spiritual substance to be unextended, indivisible, and therefore immortal. Now this assumption helps the hypothesis so little, that the extravagances fancy builds on it are as great, and the difficulties opposed to it perhaps greater, than when the soul was deemed material by some Christian, as well as Pagan philosophers; for that it was so, your learned friends will I am sure confess. Many notions, extravagant and fantastical to the ut-

* Tusc. Quæst. † Ibid.

most, might be cited. Can there be any thing more extravagant, or that implies contradiction more grossly than to divide this indivisible substance, like the mystic divines, who had a precedent for it in that mystic philosopher Plato, in an upper and lower part? The good madmen mean well, no doubt: but there is reason to suspect that, among their disciples, the lower part of the soul and the body are much defiled by imagination and sensation too, whilst the purity of the upper part, where the understanding and the will reside, preserves the conscience in a most heavenly tranquillity.

Should you object to this instance of extravagant opinions, built on the hypothesis of the soul considered as a simple unextended being united to the body, because it is taken from those of madmen who are capable of framing the most extravagant and falsest notions on the most reasonable and evident principles; let us lay aside all other instances, and produce as the most extravagant of all that wherein every man who deals in theology mad or sober concurs; that opinion for the sake of which this hypothesis of the soul was invented, and which is as little reconcilable to the wisdom of God and to the moral ideas of justice and goodness, as thought is to all the properties we know of matter. The human soul, then, which participates of the divine nature by emanation, by infusion, or by some other incomprehensible act, on account of which alone we are said to be made after the image of God, is confined to the human body, and is diffused through the whole to inform and to govern; or has a principal residence, like the seat of empire, in the pineal gland, or in that part of the brain where I have read that there is a sort of nervous juice, the source of animal spirits, of a most fragrant smell; and which puts me in mind of the perfume that the inspiring divinity spread in the temples where oracles were delivered to the Pagans. Whilst the soul is thus immersed in matter, the lustre of it is obscured by this removal from its divine original. The force and energy of it is clogged, nay, it seems since the fall to contract an inclination to corporeity, and to assimilate in some sort with this inferior nature, as if they were homogeneous. Our first parents received from sensible objects, after their fall, such strong impressions and such deep traces in their brains, "de si grands vestiges, et des traces si profondes,"* that they may well have communicated these to the brains of all their descendants. Now the thoughts of the soul being necessarily conformable to the traces that are in the brain, it is, you see, demonstrated most metaphysically, that in this respect the soul is dependent on the body, and its thoughts and inclinations

* Maleb. l. 2, c. 7.

on the thoughts and inclinations of those who begot the body it inhabits in a perpetual gradation of generations down from Adam and Eve. Thus the soul, that spiritual monarch of the human system, is subject not only to a limitation of power, but to a determination to govern ill. The soul does not remain long indeed in this state, because the system it governs is soon dissolved by death. But the short time it remains in it, decides of its state for eternity. It seems to be delivered from the body, and to be restored to the full force of its nature and to the free exercise of its powers, in order only to suffer, for the most part, during an eternity, for what it did in the government of the body when it enjoyed neither during a moment. As soon as philosophers and divines are able to reconcile all this to their ideas of the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God, the hypothesis will be no longer necessary, at least to the former, since they will not find it at all more difficult to reconcile thought to their ideas of the properties of matter.

The task would be endless, and I shall neither give myself nor you the trouble to enumerate more of the fantastical ideas, notions and opinions, that have been raised on this hypothesis of a simple immaterial active being, which understands and wills, or by which we are made able to understand and will. I make this distinction, because philosophers who set out from the same goal take very different ways in the pursuit of ideas equally fantastical. Some of them banish out of the whole extent of Being every thing, except ideas and spirits whereof we can have no idea, and which is only known by consciousness. Nothing in heaven nor earth, none of those bodies which we repute to be sensible objects have any existence out of some mind or other. They may exist eternally, and be always actually present in an eternal spirit; but they have besides this no existence, except one that is occasionally communicated. They exist in created spirits, when they are perceived; and they cease to exist, when they are not perceived there. Other philosophers again declare the existence of body hard to be proved; whilst that of spirit, under this notion of it, needs no proof according to them. They pretend to have a knowledge of immaterial spirit that excludes all doubt and they assume hypothetically that there is such an entity as body, which is the very reverse, I presume, of the most evident dictates of common sense. But, however, on this bold assumption that there is such a being as body, they proceed to account for the union of the soul with body on one hand, and with God on the other; and so multiplying hypothetical ideas one on another, they open a fantastical scene of science wherein every man's imagination (for every man has the same right to imagine) is his sole guide, and wherein it is plain from their extravagant

writings that they have, and from the nature of the thing that they can have, no other guide.

Des Cartes, who might not so much as dream perhaps that philosophers would set themselves in good earnest to banish body out of the universe and the universe with it, affirmed two substances, one whose essence is extension, and to which all the modifications of extension belong, and one whose essence is thought, and to which all the modifications of thinking belong. Now both these definitions are so evidently false that every man may know them to be so who considers them without philosophical prejudice, of all prejudices the strongest. How strong it is, appears in this very instance; for when Des Cartes affirmed extension alone to be the essence of the body, he was led by his philosophical prejudices to affirm an identical proposition and to beg a question. He affirmed that body is body, for he supposed the plenum. It is true, we cannot separate body in our ideas from extension, neither can we conceive body exclusively of solidity. But we can separate extension from solidity in our ideas; and therefore, as Mr. Locke observes, if it be a good argument, "that spirit is different from body, because thinking includes not the idea of extension in it, space or extension alone is not body, because it includes not the idea of solidity in it." In short, they are so evidently distinct ideas that he who confounds them in words must discern their difference in his understanding, whether he will or no. The difference is so evident, that if the plenum was admitted, and pure space rejected, yet still the definition of the Cartesians would be imperfect; for the essence of body, throughout this imaginary plenum, could not be extension alone. Solidity could not be banished out of it, but extension would continue to include solidity, as solidity is allowed to include extension; and extension and solidity would be two distinct ideas, but two essential properties of the same substance still.

The definition of thinking substance is not truer than this of extended substance, and the falsity of it is obvious to constant experience. That we live, and move, and think according to certain human modes of thinking, and that there must be something in the constitution of our system of being beyond the known properties of matter to produce such phenomena as these, are undeniable truths. But here certainty ends. What that something is we know not, and surely it is time we should be convinced that we cannot know it. Thankfulness and modesty would become us better than philosophical and theological assurance: thankfulness, when we look up to the great Author of all natures for raising ours either in kind or in degree above that of any other animal; and modesty, when we look down on ourselves to avow our ignorance. Instead of this, vanity and pre-

sumption determine philosophers to conclude, that since they cannot account for the phenomena of the mind, by what they know very superficially of solid extended substance, this mind must be some other substance. On this foundation they reason admirably well *à priori*, and prove with much plausibility that this mind, this soul, this spirit, is not material and is immortal. In the same manner they proceed, and well they may, to prove any thing that metaphysics and theology want to have proved. But this foundation is an assumption that cannot stand an examination *à posteriori*, and that if it could stand it would carry us but one step forward in knowledge; for if nothing which is an object of real knowledge could be opposed to the immateriality and immortality of this substance, the insuperable difficulty of accounting for the action of mind on body, and of body on mind, that are reciprocally and in their turns both active and passive, would stop our philosophical inquiries. The divine alone would have made a step sufficient for his purpose. Thus do the reputed masters of human reason advance propositions as demonstrated truths, which have not even the merit of a tolerable hypothesis. But it is not enough to affirm like them. I must prove what I say, by appealing to that criterion of truth, from which there lies no appeal, to clear and determinate ideas duly abstracted from the phenomena of nature, and to an intuitive knowledge of their agreement or disagreement. Now this, I think, it will not be hard to do.

I do not pretend to deny the possible existence of spiritual, that is, according to the present notion, of immaterial beings. I have no more right to deny that there are such, than the persons just mentioned have to affirm it. God alone, the Author of all beings, knows how many different kinds of substances, how many various sorts of being his omnipotent will has made to exist. But this I say, that we have not the same proof of the existence of unextended and spiritual, as we have of extended and solid substance. We have not the same proof, because we have not the same knowledge on which to ground any. We guess probably, if you please, from what we observe of our own minds that one exists; but we know as certainly, as God has given us the means of knowing outward objects, that the other exists. The ideas we receive by reflection are in this case and in this respect equivocal, they do not reach up to the apparent nature of the substance that causes them. But the ideas we receive from sensation are not so; they do reach up to the apparent nature of the substance that causes them. The former do not so much as constitute what Mr. Locke calls a nominal essence: the latter do. There are many questions to be asked, no doubt, concerning body, which it is impossible to answer, as

well as concerning spirit; because we are made incapable of knowing the real essence of any substance: and if there was no other difference, we might as well affirm the existence of immaterial as of material substance. But there is another difference; and it is not enough to have hinted it, I must explain it.

Mr. Locke takes much pains to show, that the notion of spirit involves no more difficulty nor obscurity in it than that of body:* and yet I think I can make him prove the contrary for me, and show against his own assertion, that we have "more and clearer primary ideas belonging to body than we have belonging to immaterial spirit." Primary ideas are the ideas of such qualities as exist always in the substance to which they belong, whether they are perceived or not. They are, therefore, essential to it, and productive, by their operations, of those secondary qualities which may be said only to exist in our perceptions of them. Of the first sort are solidity and extension, to mention no others, the primary qualities, and in our ideas the essence of matter, of which we can frame no conception exclusively of them. These notions I have taken from Mr. Locke, and they lead me to ask what the primary ideas are of spirit or immaterial substance? The primary idea or the essence of it is thought; as body is the extended, this is the thinking substance, says Des Cartes. Thought then, actual thought, is the essence of the soul or spirit, and by consequence so inseparable from it that we cannot conceive the soul or spirit to exist separately from, or exclusively of thought. But this I know to be untrue: and I may well own, since Locke has owned the same, that I have "one of those dull souls that does not perceive itself always to contemplate ideas." I distinguish very well between being asleep and being awake. I continue to live, but not to think during the soundest sleep, and the faculties of my soul and body awake together. Thus evidently do I know, that thought is no more the essence of the soul than motion of body: and if thought is not so, I ask what is?

Body is capable of receiving and communicating motion by impulse; but without solidity and extension it would be capable of neither. Thought, not being the essence of the soul, can be nothing but an action of it, and thus far answers motion in body. But what is it then which answers solidity and extension, and is the primary quality of spirit? Is it immateriality? Is it the negation of material essence? No man will, I presume, give so silly an answer. At least no man who does, must expect a reply. He who affirms, that there is in the composition of the human system, a substance to which cogitability belongs, as well as a substance to which mobility belongs, must have ideas of the first

* Essay, l. 2, c. 23.

of these substances prior in the order of nature to that of its cogitability, as he has ideas of the second prior in the same order to that of its mobility; or he must talk at random, and affirm what he does not know. His supposed distinct substance must sink into nothing, or be confounded with the other; for it will cost a reasonable mind much less to assume, that a substance known by some of its properties may have others that are unknown, and may be capable, in various systems, of operations quite inconceivable by us, according to the designs of infinite wisdom, than to assume that there is a substance concerning which men do not pretend to know what it is, but merely what it is not.

It may be said, Locke has said it, that we know no more of the solid than of the thinking thing, nor how we are extended than how we think. But the comparison is improper, and unfair. It is improper, because it compares the operation of an assumed substance with the known properties of a real substance. It is unfair, because it slides over and evades the objection that we have not a positive idea of any one primary property of spirit, or at least that if cogitability be such a primary quality, this definition of the soul is no better than that of a moveable substance would be, if it was given as the full definition of body. But besides, though the cohesion of the solid particles of body be not sufficiently accounted for by the pressure of the air, or of any ambient fluid, and though that seeming property of matter, which is called for want of a better name attraction, be not yet perhaps enough established, yet we have a very clear idea of cohesion in its effects, by which insensible atoms are so united and held together, that the bodies they compose become sensible to us, and give us the ideas of solidity and extension. Have we any knowledge proportionable to this, as imperfect as it is, of soul under the notion of an immaterial spirit? It cannot be said that we have. Upon the whole, therefore, we may conclude without presumption against two of the greatest men of their age, against Des Cartes, that thinking is not the essence of the soul; and against Locke, that a solid extended substance is not quite so hard to be conceived as a thinking immaterial one.

But Locke, much less dogmatical than Des Cartes, how far soever he favored the reigning opinion, or thought it necessary for him to keep measures with those who support it, was far from asserting the immateriality of the soul. He found inducements of probability to this and to the contrary opinion, certainty of demonstration for neither.* When he is to show that our knowledge is narrower and more confined than our ideas, he brings the instance of these two, of matter and thinking, and of

* Essay, l. 4, c. 3.

the impossibility of knowing by the contemplation of them, or by any other way, except by revelation, whether that which thinks in us be not material. He sees "no contradiction in it, that the first eternal thinking Being should, if he pleased, give to certain systems of created senseless matter, put together as he thinks fit, some degrees of sense, perception and thought." He endeavors to guard against theological choler, by urging "that the great ends of morality and religion are well enough secured without philosophical proofs of the soul's immateriality, since it is evident that he who made us—sensible, intelligent beings can," and he adds, "will restore us to the like state of sensibility in another world." But all this precaution could not save him from the joint attacks of philosophers and of divines, not very orthodox on other points. They* have insisted, since thought is not the essence of matter, nor an attribute of matter neither, in as much as it does not flow necessarily from that essence it cannot have been communicated nor superadded even by omnipotence to any system of matter; because essences are unchangeable, and attributes uncommunicable; so that matter cannot be made to think. The moment any system begins to think, it ceases to be material: and that which was matter becomes a substance of another kind. In fine that it is nonsense to assert that God "can† superadd a faculty of thinking to incogitativity, of acting freely to necessity, and so on.‡" It is hard to say, whether in these

* Leibnitz, Wollaston, &c.

† Rel. of Nat. delineated, § 9.

‡ Since it has been observed on this occasion, in how trifling a manner the pretended masters of abstract reasoning subject the reality of things to words; it may not be improper to observe another fallacy that runs through all their discourses, concerning the thinking substance.

When we know with certainty that any being exists, many doubts may be raised, we may endeavor to solve them by hypotheses, and we may endeavor it in vain: but still they will be no more than difficulties to the solution of which our knowledge does not extend. The known truth will remain unshaken. On the other hand, when we assume on probable arguments that any being exists, the doubts and difficulties that arise are real objections; because they are probable arguments opposed to probable arguments, and the whole being hypothesis, the whole may be shaken.

Theists demonstrate the existence of one supreme, infinite, all-perfect Being. Atheists cavil; and, though they cannot unravel the demonstration, they oppose doubts and difficulties, as if probable arguments, supposing these to be such, could prevail against demonstration. Their proceeding is absurd: and reason is evidently on the side of the theist. But now, are they, who assert a distinct thinking substance united in the human system, to a material unthinking substance, in the case of the theists? Are they who deny this, in the case of the atheists? Certainly not. The former, except a few who are in the height of a metaphysical delirium, do not pretend that they can demonstrate by reason what they maintain, and yet they argue as if they had made this demonstration. This is the fallacy I mean: and I need not go far to seek

and other common-place reasonings on the same subject there is more presumption, or trifling and playing with words in a solemn dogmatical tone. They amount to no more than this. We metaphysicians and ontosophists have fixed the essence of matter. It can be no other than it is represented in our abstract ideas, those eternal natures independent of God himself. If you suppose it modified or mixed in any system, so as to be no longer inert and senseless, it is no longer conformable to our ideas: it is there-

an instance of it, since I find one in the Religion of Nature delineated, that follows the passage I have quoted.

This solemn author then, in his third argument for the immortality of the soul, drops the question, whether it be immaterial or not, on which he had pronounced so dogmatically a few pages before, and asks, only by way of objection, "whether that soul, be it what it will, which ceases to think when the body is not fitly disposed, can think at all when the body is quite dissolved?" Now to this question he proposes to give an answer, of which he speaks modestly and diffidently, and yet presumes it may be turned "even into an argument for the immortality of the soul."

This answer comes out to be nothing better than a string of suppositions. He, who says that the power of thinking is a faculty superadded by the Creator to certain systems of matter in various degrees and proportions, assumes indeed, but he assumes conformably to the phenomena. He, who says that thought is the essence of a distinct substance united to certain systems of matter, because he cannot conceive how matter can be made capable of thinking even by Omnipotence, assumes without any support from the phenomena, nay even in an apparent contradiction to them. Every instance, therefore, of this contradiction is a good argument in favor of the former, and against the latter opinion. No matter. The pneumatic philosopher proceeds as if his first proposition was proved, and he had only a few difficulties to remove rather than objections to refute, as if his doctrine wanted only to be explained. He explains it no more than he invented it, on the foundation of that which actually is, but on what he thinks may be; and so he may argue on, if he finds men idle enough to dispute much with him, as long as his imagination can supply fantastic ideas and notions.

The very question, whether the "soul, which ceases to think when the body is not fitly disposed, can think at all when the body is quite dissolved," supposes that there is a soul, that is, a distinct substance united to it, though this neither has been, nor can be proved. The answer sets out by supposing that this distinct substance is a limited being, limited, obstructed, clogged by the body. Even here we might interrupt this licentious maker of hypotheses, and insist that it is not congruous to reason to assume that a substance, which is immaterial according to him, which has none above it except the substance of God himself according to St. Austin, and by which we are made after the image of God according to all those who maintain the same doctrine, for he must not be suffered to slide over any of his, or their extravagant assertions—is limited, obstructed, clogged by that material substance by which we are allied to the beasts of the field, and made after the image of other animals.

But to pass by this, the soul then is "limited, its activity and faculties being more obstructed and clogged at one time than another, and most of all in sleep, or a deliquium." The eyes, the two windows of its prison, are shut, and the nerves which receive the impressions of outward objects, and convey sensations to the soul, are benumbed. This branch of knowledge is cut off, therefore, in such circumstances, and thought cannot be exercised on objects

fore no longer matter, such as it came out of the region of possibility into that of actuality; it is another substance, and must be called by another name. God cannot make our ideas of incogitativity to be ideas of thinking, nor our ideas of necessity to be ideas of acting freely. To such reasoners it would be, I think, sufficient to say; learn that human knowledge is derived from existence: and that to be real, it must be conformable to things as they exist. Conform your ideas, therefore, to them, and pretend no longer to

that do not present themselves to the soul. But why then is it not exercised on the ideas and notions that the soul is possessed of already, in the contemplation of which it has no need of sense; so much otherwise, that detached from sense, and wrapped in pure intellect, the soul meditates and reasons with greater intenseness and clearness about these abstract ideas and notions?

If you ask this question, you will be answered by other suppositions. You will be told that the use of words is necessary even in abstract meditation, that this silent language depends on memory, and that memory depends on certain tracks which are made on the brain. You will be told that these tracks are the characters of that book wherein the soul must read to think in this manner; and that when the characters are overcast by vapors, or any other way darkened, the soul can read them no more till the cloud is dispelled. You may object that thinking cannot be, on this hypothesis, the essence of the soul, or that the soul must cease to be what it is every time we fall into sound sleep, or faint entirely into a deliquium, and return to be what it was before, every time we awake or come out of the deliquium; which differs little from assuming a perpetual creation of souls every twenty-four hours at least. There is something so very ridiculous in this notion, that I should be ashamed to mention it, if it did not follow necessarily that of a substance whose essence is thought and who does not always think, and if it was not of use to show in every instance, as it occurs, the monstrous absurdities in which the reasonings of these metaphysicians are apt to terminate.

The metaphysician we have to deal with here screens himself from the imputation of this absurdity, as well as he can, by a change of terms. He asserts only that the soul preserves a capacity of thinking "even in those circumstances in which it thinks no more than if the body was destroyed:" and from hence he assumes, that "it may and will preserve this capacity when the body is destroyed, cut to pieces, or mouldered to dust." He asserts the first on the evidence of the phenomena. He assumes the last without any possible evidence from them, nay with a strong presumption derived from them against him. Whilst we are alive we preserve the capacity of thinking, I should rather call it the faculty, just as we preserve the faculty of moving and other faculties plainly corporeal, subject alike to many impediments and many infirmities of the body, in which the faculty of thinking has the largest share, as it might be shown in various instances, in that of madness particularly. When we are dead, all these faculties are dead with us: and the sole difference that we make in our judgments of the one and the other arises from hence, that we imagine the capacity or faculty of thinking to belong to a substance distinct from the body, concerning which the phenomena can show us nothing after death; and concerning which by consequence metaphysicians and divines think themselves at liberty to say whatever they please. You would smile, if you heard any one say, that the man who has preserved the faculty of walking, after having lost and recovered frequently the use of his legs, will for this reason walk eternally. But you hearken very gravely when you hear another say, on as little knowledge, that he will think eter-

control or to determine particular existence by abstract notions. As long as matter is senseless and inert, it is not a thinking substance, nor ought to be called so. But when, in any system of it, the essential properties, extension, solidity, &c. are maintained, that system is material still, though it become a sensitive plant, a reasoning elephant, or a refining metaphysician. It would be nonsense to assert, what no man does assert, that the idea of incogitativity can be the idea of thinking; but it is nonsense, and

nally; because he has preserved the capacity of thinking, after losing it in the whole or in part on so many occasions.

How much soever we may deem the thinking and unthinking substance to be distinct in nature, still it will be true that these assumed souls were given to inform bodies, and thereby complete the human system. The system would be too imperfect to answer any conceivable purpose of making it, if either of them was wanting. Without thinking, the body would be unable to begin motion, and to perform many necessary corporeal operations. Without a body, the soul would be unable to acquire the first elements of knowledge, the materials of thought. In short, neither of them could exist, and act in a state of total separation from the other. Wollaston was so sensible of this, that he supposes it, and in order to maintain that the soul does not cease to exist when the body does, notwithstanding this admission, he retails to his readers an old trite chimera of the Platonic philosopher, which has been mentioned above. He assumes, that the soul has another body besides this which perishes. "Some fine vehicle that dwells with it in the brain, and goes off with it at death." This innermost body, which may be compared to the shirt of the soul, receives impressions from the outward body, which may be compared to its great coat: and as those impressions of sensible objects are communicated to the shirt, so the shirt communicates them to the soul, who sits enveloped in it in the brain. On the other side reciprocally, the soul being thus put into motion produces motion in the "contiguous spirits and nerves by moving its own vehicle, and so moves the body." When the great coat is worn out, or destroyed by any accident, the soul flies in its shirt away into the open fields of heaven, and thus undressed as it were, the impressions that were made mediately by the nerves are made immediately on it: thus it becomes, "as it were, all eye to visible objects, and all ear to audible, and so on."

I might have explained this hypothesis further, with Mr. Wollaston's help, but my patience would not serve me; though he thinks it contains nothing impossible, and therefore nothing but what may be. Many things are, he says very truly, by ways which we do not nor can understand. But then this plea is not to be admitted in every case alike; for if it was, it would go a great way to screen the false theories which philosophers are apt to frame both in physics and metaphysics. A primum mobile, an element of fire, were names invented to signify things which have no existence; and such was the word soul, perhaps, in philosophical consideration, if we take it not for a faculty superadded to the human corporeal system, but for a distinct substance united to it, and co-operating with it. But metaphysical figments impose longer than physical; because there is more room for Wollaston's plea, and because hypotheses may be heaped on hypotheses with less control in one, than in the other.

I might add, that this figment of a soul, if it be a figment, received strength from the superstitious theology of the heathens. Nothing can confirm and consecrate notions, however erroneous, so much: and this philosophical notion

something worse than nonsense, to assert what you assert, that God cannot give the faculty of thinking, a faculty in the principle of it entirely unknown to you, to systems of matter whose essential properties are solidity, extension, &c., not incogitativity. This term of negation can be no more the essence of matter than that other immateriality can be the essence of spirit. Our ideas of solidity and extension do not include the idea of thought, neither do they include that of motion; but they exclude neither: and the arguments you draw from the divisibility of matter against its cogitability, which you deny, might be not ill employed against its mobility which you admit, as I suppose.

SECTION IX.

It has been said, that this boasted science about soul or spirit has not the merit even of a good hypothesis, though it pretends to be demonstrated. You may perhaps begin to think so. But in order to be the more convinced of this, it may not be time misspent to reflect, before we leave the subject, on the sole means we have of acquiring any knowledge of this kind, and to consider how far these means can carry us in the inquiry.

That all our knowledge of corporeal substance must be founded in the experience we have of our own, and in the experiments and observations we are able to make on other bodies, will not be denied in the present state of philosophy. As little can it be denied, that all our knowledge of soul or spirit must be founded, to be real, on what every man may know by intuition of his own soul or spirit; for we cannot contemplate other souls, as we can other bodies. Hypotheses may be made about either, but they must be made in both cases under the same restrictions. When they are designed only to amuse the mind with a sort of analogi-

was incorporated into theology from the first. Legislators and magistrates, poets and priests, as well as philosophers, enforced it with all their authority: and the event has been a proof of this great truth, that "the understanding is as subject to the impressions of fancy, as to those of vulgar notions."—*Bacon.*

I might observe further how little it became Wollaston, who would not believe that thinking is a faculty added by the Creator to certain systems of matter; because he could not reconcile this opinion to his idea of matter, though this opinion is conformable to all the phenomena of the mind; how little, I say, it became him, and must become any other man who reasons in the same way, to urge in defence of all his hypotheses and paradoxes, that many things are by ways which we cannot understand.

But I will detain you no longer about such discourse as would convince you, if you heard it at Monroe's, that the philosopher who held it was a patient of the doctor, not yet perfectly restored to his senses.

cal appearance of probability, and pretend to be nothing more than physical and metaphysical romances, they are surely very innocent, and employ our time better at least than most of our other amusements do; and yet even they must contain nothing that is absolutely repugnant to the phenomena. But when they take a more serious air, when they pretend to be founded in some knowledge and to lead to more; and, above all, when they pretend to be not so much hypotheses, as demonstrated systems; it is not enough that they be barely reconcileable to the phenomena. The phenomena must confirm them; or they must be rejected, on what authority soever they come recommended. Authority has been extended very far in theology and philosophy from the times when these names were first assumed, and perhaps long before. Plato having spoke in that Pythagorical rhapsody, the Timæus, about the visible gods, the gods made to be seen, "qui tales geniti sunt ut cernantur," that is, the celestial phenomena, he proceeds to speak of demons, that is, of invisible spiritual natures: but of these he confesses himself unable to speak on the strength of his parts, or on his own knowledge; for which reason he has recourse to tradition, and to the authority of the ancients, who were born of gods, and knew their parents extremely well. "Priscis itaque viris in hac re credendum est, qui diis geniti parentes suos optimè noverint." These men we must believe, he says, though the things they have delivered down be not confirmed by conclusive nor even by probable reasons. "Licet nec necessariis nec verisimilibus rationibus eorum oratio confirmetur." On such respectable authority did the divine Plato vend, to his own and to future ages, all the mysterious nonsense that Pythagoras and he had imported from the Egyptian and Eastern schools of theology and philosophy. But if this might be borne in a theology that pretends to be revealed, and ought to be submitted to in one that proves itself to be so, it is intolerable in philosophy; for in all the parts of that, in the very first, in natural theology, human reason, that is, common sense, is the sole judge; and the greatest doctor has no more right to impose his authority on me, than I have to impose mine on him. I do this justice therefore to Plato; I do not believe he was in earnest, when he set the example: though I believe that many great divines and metaphysicians have been in earnest, when they have followed it.

If men had consulted the phenomena of their own minds alone, which can alone afford us any means of acquiring knowledge of spirit or thinking substance, instead of hearkening to such idle traditions, and raising chimeras of their own upon those of other men; if they had proceeded in the analytic method from particulars to generals, as far and no farther than the former justified the

latter; it seems to me that they could scarce have imagined the substance of soul absolutely distinct from that of body; nor have created an habitual reverence for an opinion so ill founded in appearances. They have pursued another method, which has brought them, after two or three thousand years, to this paradoxical dilemma; they must either maintain the hypothesis of two distinct substances, and explain in some tolerable manner, which they have not yet done, the union and mutual action on one another of unextended and extended beings; or they must deny the absolute existence of any thing extrinsical to the mind, and maintain that God did nothing more, when he created the world, than give a relative existence to things; that is, make objects perceptible to his creatures which had existed eternally in the divine, and acquired then a new existence in the human mind, but had no other; that he created finite spirits, in short nothing else, spirits to perceive, but nothing to be perceived, except his eternal ideas; that there is no material world, but that the intellectual world is made perceivable by us, according to an order that God has established. Was I obliged by the terrors of an inquisition to embrace one of these two hypotheses, I confess freely that I would embrace the last, strange as it is, as the least inconceivable in itself, and the most convenient in its consequences. But the method taken to frame them revolts me against both.

This method we find recommended very emphatically in several places, and on several occasions, in the works of Plato: and I choose to give it you, or at least some general notion of it, according to the exposition of Marsilius Ficinus,* his best interpreter and commentator. First then, of bodies there are several sorts, ethereal, that is, celestial; æreal, such as ghosts wear; and terrestrial, such as we wear during our lives. We cannot have experimental knowledge of the two former; and experiment and observation are not proper means of arriving at knowledge even of the latter. Corporeal objects dim the sight of the soul: to know them we must look off from them, and must not expect to discover any truth concerning them, unless we have recourse to the ideas of things. "Nisi ad ideas confugiamus." Of souls in the next place, it is extremely hard to know the substance in this life, because we perceive it, "sub corporeâ specie," under a corporeal appearance, and are apt to think in a corporeal manner. The surest way therefore to comprehend it, is to proceed by moral purgation, and metaphysical abstraction. "Ideoque tutissimam rationem ad animam comprehendendam esse tum moralem purgationem tum metaphysicam abstractionem." And

* Marsil. Fic. Argum. Phæ. et alibi.

if all this will not do, some revelation is necessary, "opus est divino quodam verbo." One would think however, that it should do; since by intenseness of meditation a philosopher may abstract himself from his senses and his imagination, according to Plato, and employ his mind wholly about incorporeal natures and ideas to which it becomes united by this abstraction; and since in this state he alone has wisdom and knowledge, though being as it were out of himself, extra se "positus," he is laughed at by the vulgar as a madman. You smile perhaps; but reflect a little on the systems (so we will call them civilly for once) of some modern philosophers about body as well as spirit, on their method of reasoning and on the dogmatical language they hold upon subjects the most remote from human apprehension; and you will not think that I do them any wrong in comparing their manner of philosophising with that of the founder of the academy, his mysterious masters the Egyptians, or his enthusiastical scholars the latter Platonists. Let us then leave those, who think themselves able to arrive at superior knowledge by some such methods as these, to be happy in their own imaginations, and let us rather pity than blame them, when they treat our real though imperfect knowledge as a chimera, and the chimeras of their own brains as real knowledge. But then let these purged, these purified, these illuminated spirits, who have a constant communication by ideas with the supreme spirit, allow us, who have none of these advantages, nor any conception that they have them, to pursue quietly the acquisition of a little human knowledge by human means.

We have clear and determinate ideas of what we call body by sensation, and of what we call spirit by reflection: or to avoid cavil as much as may be, without giving up common sense, we have such ideas by sensation as the various powers of that substance, called body, are ordained to produce in us, and we have such ideas by reflection as the inward operations of that which we call spirit, be it substance or faculty, excite in us. We are able to contemplate these ideas naked, if I may say so, and stripped of the dress of words. How far then does the contemplation of these ideas carry us towards knowledge, or how high do we rise by it in the scale of probability? That is the only question which a reasonable man, who is content to know, as God has made him capable of knowing, will ask. The answer must be to this effect. Philosophers talk of matter and spirit, as if they had a thorough acquaintance with both, when in truth they know nothing of either beyond a few phenomena insufficient to frame any hypothesis. The atomical system, which Leucippus took perhaps from other philosophers, which Democritus took from Leucippus to improve it, and which Epicurus took

from Democritus to corrupt it, has been revived with great reason. But yet we must not talk of matter as if we knew it in these first elements or principles of it, and abstractedly from all the forms under which we perceive it. These original particles, in which the nature of it consists, and on which the constitution of it under all its forms depends, are far beyond the reach of any analysis we can make, of any knowledge we can acquire.—Whether these particles be uniform and homogeneous, or whether they be of different kinds, different even in substance as well as in size, figure, and other circumstances or accidents, is as much unknown to the proudest dogmatist, as to you or to me. Nay, whether many of these original particles may not be endued with active principles, such, for instance, as cause fermentation in some and cohesion in all bodies, is a point that none of them can determine: and yet one need not scruple to say, that the affirmative may be assumed on better grounds than their hypotheses are, notwithstanding the repeated din of inert, senseless, stupid, passive, and similar epithets, which they ring in our ears whenever they speak of body or matter. Their whole discourse, when they go beyond a few apparent properties, whereof we are fitted to have ideas, and which have been already discovered, is one continued petition of principle, and grows as nauseous, though not so mortal, as the crambe of Juvenal.

Body or matter is compounded and wrought into various systems before it becomes sensible to us. We behold some that are indeed inert, senseless, stupid, and in appearance merely passive. But we behold others that have vegetative life, juices and spirits that circulate and ferment in them, by which they are nourished and by which they grow. They have not the power of beginning motion, but motion which is renewed in them after it has entirely ceased, and both by causes as material as themselves, continues in them, and they live, and move, and propagate their species; till their frame is dissolved by age or sickness, or some external violence. We behold others again that have animal life, and that go from rest to motion and from motion to rest, independently of any outward cause that determines such effects by a physical necessity in this case, as we observe to be done in the former. We discover, by the help of microscopes, an immense variety of these animal systems. Where they begin, God alone their Creator and ours can tell: and it would be as impertinent to ask this question, as it is to demand what "the degree of fineness, or the alteration in the situation of its parts, is, at which matter may begin to find itself alive and cogitative?"* They who defend so ill their own hypotheses would do well to

* Rel. of Nat. Delin. § 9.

be less dogmatical and supercilious when they attack those that seem probable to other men. Wherever these animal systems begin, their beginning and the principles of their composition are alike unknown. All we know is that they are, and all we suppose is that they are material beings to which no Cartesian nor any philosopher, who does not deny the existence of body, will, I presume, object.

As these animal systems come to be more and more sensible to us, and as our means and opportunities of observing them increase, we discover in them, and according to their different species, or even among individuals of the same species, in some more, in others fewer, of the same appearances, that denote a power of thinking in us from the lowest conceivable degrees of it, up to such as are not far, if at all remote, from those in which some men enjoy it. I say some men, because I think it indisputable that the distance between the intellectual faculties of different men is often greater than that between the same faculties in some men and some other animals.

If now we are to form a general conclusion from all these concurrent phenomena, without any further reasoning about them than such as they justify, what must it be? It must be plainly this, that there is in the whole animal kind one intellectual spring common to every species, but vastly distinguished in its effects; that though it appears to be the same spring in all, yet it seems to be differently tempered, and to have more elasticity and force in some and less in others; and that besides this, the apparent difference in the constitutions and organizations of animals, seems to account for the different determinations of its motion, and the surprising variety of its effects. If the plain man who has formed these general conclusions, on particular observations and experiments, should be asked the trite question, whether he conceives that matter, however figured or moved, subtilised or fermented, can be pleasure or pain, desire or aversion? To answer truly, I think, he must answer that he cannot conceive matter to be any of these, nor even how a system of matter becomes capable of having any ideas, affections or passions, any more than he can conceive how a multitude of other phenomena can be as he perceives evidently that they are. But that he has pushed his inquiry as far as the true means of inquiry are open, that is, as far as the phenomena can guide him; that he cannot draw any other conclusion from them than this, that all animal systems are material; and that he must content himself with this, unless some other can be drawn from the same phenomena.

The philosopher is not so content. If physics will not serve his purpose, metaphysics and theology shall. "Ad ideas confugiendum est;" and since the particular phenomena of the whole

animal system lead to a conclusion he dislikes, he resolves not to be determined by them, but to reason, without regard to them, from his own abstract ideas; and from these he draws a conclusion as inconceivable as that which he rejects. The plain man owns himself unable to explain how material systems think, though their phenomena are so many positive proofs that oblige him to conclude they have this power. The philosopher decides negatively on such proofs as his abstract ideas of matter furnish to him, that no system of matter thinks, that omnipotence cannot any way communicate to it the faculty of thinking, and positively that whatever thinks is a simple being, immaterial, indissoluble, and therefore immortal. The plain man has recourse once more to the phenomena, and objects that we must be reduced, if we receive this hypothesis, to assert that other animals besides men have immaterial and immortal souls; or, that no other animal, besides man, has the faculty of thinking. The immaterialist is far from contending for the first: and the materialist cannot admit the latter, in opposition to the phenomena; in opposition to which no hypothesis is admissible.

There seem to be but three ways to get rid of this objection. Each of them has been tried, and each of them is a different hypothesis. By one, this knot and a multitude of others are cut asunder very easily; for it consists in asserting roundly that there is no such thing as material systems, nor matter, nor any existence out of mind eternal or created, as we have mentioned already. All observations of the phenomena which suppose such an existence, are therefore deceptions according to this scheme: and it would be ridiculous to attempt proving that other animals, besides men, think, to one who denies that these animals exist, or even that he and the man that should dispute with him exist, in the sense in which existence is universally understood.

As these philosophers take body from men, there are others who not only take thought from the rest of the animal kind, but reduce them to the state of automates or machines. Whether Des Cartes advanced this paradox in good earnest, and really doubted whether other animals had a power of thinking or not, it is impossible to determine. That he should be in earnest it is hard to conceive; since any reasons of doubt which he might have in this case would have been reasons of doubt in the case of other men, who may give more, but cannot give more evident signs of thought than their fellow creatures. But we may persuade ourselves very easily, that Malebranche maintained the same paradox in very good earnest, since it has a nearer and a more favorable relation to his own whimsies, and to some theological tenets, than is commonly observed. Thus the same thing which happens to liars happens often to men who seek the truth

very sincerely; but imagine too lightly that they have found it when they have only made an hypothesis, and that they know things as they are when they only guess how they may be. One hypothesis wants another to support it, that a third, and so on, till philosophy grows to be what it has always been, an aggregate of motley systems, partly real and partly fantastical.

These two paradoxes have not maintained much credit in the world. Men continue to be persuaded that there are mountains and rivers, and trees and animals: and I apprehend that this vulgar notion will continue to prevail. Just so they believe still that there is some difference between the parish clock and the town bull; that the shepherd's dog perceives and wills as readily as the shepherd himself; and that the philosopher's horse knows the way to his stable, as well as the philosopher knows the way to his study. They will not be sufficient, therefore, to remove the plain man's objection, and recourse must be had to the third hypothesis which compounds matters a little, and is a little more plausible in appearance, but in reality less defensible than that of Des Cartes: one stands in direct opposition to the phenomena, but the other contradicts itself. The hypothesis I mean, is that which assumes a rational soul in man alone, and a sensitive soul alone in all other animals.

He who should have read all that has been written on this subject, from Aristotle down to the author of the pre-established harmony, and who should have meditated ever so long on these writings, would find it a very hard task to give a full, and an impracticable one to give an intelligible, account of what he had found there; so confused, so obscure is this labyrinth of hypotheses. I shall not set my foot far into it; for philosophers, according to their usual practice, have reasoned and disputed in this case to no other purpose than to render diffuse and intricate what lies in the narrowest compass, and has really no difficulty in it, if we know where to stop.

In order to avoid that paradox, which some at least of the Stoicians held, and which Gomez Pereyra and Des Cartes renewed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and to maintain at the same time the superiority of the human nature, not only in degree but in kind too, this notion of a sensitive soul has been advanced, or rather continued and enforced; for it descends to us from the same springs from which so many other absurdities have flowed. The distinction between souls and images of souls, "animæ et animarum simulacra," might lead to it. But there are other passages in Plato that favor it more directly. Aristotle spoke less figuratively and more clearly on the subject, for he bestowed sensation, memory, and the passions on other animals, and reason on man exclusively. On this principle the

schoolmen and all the peripateticians have proceeded, and it is at this hour the reigning opinion among sound divines. There cannot be, however, a more unsound doctrine, if extreme absurdities can render it so; for either they who maintain it suppose the sensitive soul to be a middle being between body and spirit, or they do not. If they suppose it so, they suppose it to be neither extended nor unextended, neither material nor immaterial, and we have no idea of any other substance. If they do not suppose it to be so, they affirm without knowing it, what they mean to deny; for they must admit (unless philosophers have a right to contradict the inward as well as the outward phenomena, and intuitive as well as sensitive knowledge) that the power of thinking, that very power whereof we are conscious, is as necessary to the perception of the slightest sensation as it is to geometrical reasoning. There is no conceivable difference in the faculty or power: the sole difference arises from the degree in which it is, or can be exerted. It has been asked, will you deny the power of God to create a substance capable of sensation only, and not of reason? No man living has higher notions of the divine omnipotence, nor carries them further than I do. An argument fairly drawn from the power of God will determine me at any time and on any occasion; though it does not determine these men who insist so much upon it, when they hope to make it serve their purpose by an unfair application of it. I am persuaded that God can make material systems capable of thought, not only because I must renounce one of the kinds of knowledge that he has given me, and the first though not the principal in the order of knowing, or admit that he has done so; but because the original principles and many of the properties of matter being alike unknown to me, he has not shown me that it implies any contradiction to assert a material thinking substance. This now, which implies no contradiction, except it be with their precarious hypothetical ideas, these great asserters of the divine power deny. But at the same time they draw another argument unfairly from this very power, by assigning it as the cause of an effect which does manifestly imply contradiction. It implies contradiction manifestly, to say that a substance capable of thought by its nature, in one degree or instance, is by its nature incapable of it in another. God may limit the exercise of this power, no doubt, in his creatures variously, according to their different organisations, or to the imperceptible differences that there may be in the atoms that compose their bodies, or by other causes absolutely inconceivable. This happens to other animals: it happens to men, and the largest understanding is limited in the exercise of its mental faculties. But a nature capable of sensation, that is of perception, that is of thought, (to say nothing

of spontaneous motion, of memory, nor of the passions,) cannot be incapable of another mode of thinking, any more than finite extension can be capable of one figure alone, or a piece of wax that receives the impression of one seal cannot receive that of another.

We may apply very justly to those who have maintained the doctrine of sensitive and rational souls, and to those who have made new hypotheses concerning them, as well as concerning the apparent reciprocal action of body and mind, what Bacon says of the Greek philosophers, "impetu tantum intellectûs usi sunt, regulam non adhibuerunt: sed omnia in meditatione acri et mentis volutatione et agitatione perpetuâ posuerunt." It must be confessed that some of the moderns have been guilty of this as well as the ancients, and, I think, with less excuse; because experimental philosophy has been more in use, and the means of acquiring knowledge of this kind have been more common in our days. Notwithstanding this, we have seen men of the greatest name neglect sometimes entirely, at their first setting out to inquire into the nature of things spiritual or corporeal, an exact and sufficient observation of the phenomena; and still oftener, contenting themselves with a transient view of particulars, hurry on to general knowledge according to the natural propensity of the human mind, without having this rule, if I may say so, in their hands; or else bending it to their abstract notions, instead of squaring these scrupulously by it. It seems that the great author himself, whose censure I have just quoted, does something of this kind in his fourth book of the augmentation of science, where he makes a distinction between rational and sensitive souls. The latter he affirms to be a material substance, "planè substantia corporea censenda est," without perceiving that this cannot be, unless matter can be made capable of thinking. This soul he assigns to brutes, according to the received notion. According to the same, he supposes the rational to be a superior soul in men, without perceiving that the supposition of these two souls is as absurd, as that of an upper and lower part in the same simple and indivisible being. He concludes by hinting that the sensitive soul in man may be considered as confounded with and lost in the rational, "ipsa anima rationalis et spiritus potius appellatione quam animæ indigitari possit," without perceiving that we may just as well confound the rational with the sensitive, as the sensitive with the rational soul, and that if nothing can think which is material, that which thinks in other animals must be immaterial; or if any thing can think which is material, that there is no pretence to conclude that which thinks in man to be immaterial. I am afraid, therefore, that the inquisition which he recommends in this place, and which seemed to

him to be almost wanting, "quasi desiderari videtur," must have been pursued on his principles under the influence, not of one, but of all the four kinds of false ideas and notions, the "idola tribûs, specûs, fori, et theatri," which he has named, not without some of the affectation prevalent in his age; and which must in all ages render it hard for truth to enter into the mind, and be apt to disturb the progress of it when it is there.

This hypothesis, and the others of fresher invention, are like the armed men of Cadmus; they kill one another: not one survives the rest. Affectation of superior genius and knowledge has decoyed men, no doubt, into these scenes of fantastical ideas and notions: but it must be confessed, that they have been forced into them likewise, in some degree, both by interest, another interest than that of truth, and by invincible prejudice. There are certain opinions fixed by authority; an authority that deserved no respect in its original, and that could never have imposed by itself, but one that custom renders sacred, and that acquires by subsequent authorities, and by circumstances foreign to it, an importance, in the whole, or in part, which nothing else could have communicated to it. My Lord Bacon himself observes to this purpose, and he might have applied the observation to himself on this and other occasions, that the greatest geniuses have suffered violence in all ages; whilst out of regard to their own characters they have submitted to the judgment of their age, and of the populace: so that time, like a river, has brought down light and tumid error, whilst solid and weighty truth is sunk to the bottom and is dived for by few. Thus the notions that prevail about soul, spiritual substance, and spiritual operations and things, took their rise in schools where such doctrines were taught as men would be sent to bedlam for teaching at this day. Their inward doctrine, for they have two, might be more reasonable, perhaps, but we cannot wonder if that which was taught to a few, and which the few kept secret, was soon lost; whilst the outward doctrine, which was taught to whole nations, and glared with symbols, allegories and parables, or philosophical fables, was preserved. Some of these doctrines are come down to us: and it is probable that they have lost nothing of their primitive extravagance in the writings of Plato, through which they have been conveyed principally; since there never was a more wild or less consistent author in prose or verse.

In the confusion of fantastical ideas and notions which the introduction of the Platonic philosophy into Christianity occasioned or increased, as I shall show at large hereafter and on more occasions than one, that of a material soul seems to have prevailed at first; at least it is certain that the most zealous writers for Christianity maintained it, or supposed it. The notion, however,

of its immateriality, was soon and more generally established. Plato, their great master in metaphysical pneumatics, gave them in his vague and figurative manner of writing sufficient foundation for either of these opinions: and the last seemed the most favorable to that of the immortality of the soul. From that time to this, whoever attacks one is supposed to attack the other, and is clamored against, accordingly, by every one who affects a strict orthodoxy, without observing, or perhaps though he does observe, that the opinion of the soul's immateriality adds no strength to that of its immortality; nay, that by resting it too much on the former they weaken the latter, and build on a principle which they can never make intelligible, when they might assume another very intelligible and quite sufficient for their purpose. Now these opinions being thus united, their union being confirmed, by the authority of the whole Christian church, and the belief of it inculcated by the process of education, the ideas of immateriality and immortality become so intimately associated in the minds of men, that many can no longer separate them when they commence philosophers; and that those, who see that if immateriality may be said to imply immortality, it will not follow that immortality, in this case, implies necessarily immateriality, choose rather to keep terms with error than pass for heterodox. Thus prejudice and interest conspire to put philosophers under a necessity of maintaining that the soul is an immaterial being, and, in order to maintain it, of inventing the most extravagant hypotheses. When they have once agreed that twice two make five, they may well assert that twice four make ten.

The plain man, a much better philosopher in the true sense of the word, keeps out of this confusion; for he pushes his inquiries no further than the phenomena lead him, nor presumes to affirm any proposition which is not suggested and confirmed by them. They do not lead him far in his inquiries about spirit, but they lead him surely. Corporeal nature affords men a fund of knowledge, such as it is, which they can never exhaust. We acquire our first ideas from thence, and by industry and experiment it is in our power to acquire more and to improve this kind of knowledge daily. How much it is so appears in the vast improvements that have been made since experimental philosophy has been cultivated. The plain man will be apt to ask why a proportionable improvement has not been made in that knowledge which is called metaphysical? And I think he will give himself this plain answer, that men have in one case means in their power that are proportioned to their ends in some degree, and that they have them not in the other in any degree, though they proceed fantastically as if they had. That there are corporeal natures we have sensitive knowledge. That there are spiri-

tual natures, distinct from all these, we have no knowledge at all. We only infer that there are such, because we know that we think, and are not able to conceive how material systems can think. We are conscious of certain modes of thinking, of certain faculties and operations of what we call mind, and of certain inward emotions which we ascribe to the mind, and which we call affections and passions. This is some degree of knowledge, no doubt, and it might be improved to conduct better our understandings and our lives too. But then the principles of it, the mental phenomena, are few; and, beyond those that are obvious to immediate reflection, there are none to be discovered. There are neither microscopes nor telescopes to assist our inward sight, and neither geometry nor algebra can be of any real use in this part of natural philosophy: whereas, in the other, the vast scene of corporeal nature, which will never be quite opened, is always opening to human industry. We discover frequently new phenomena, or we correct and improve our former observations: and every step of this kind is an advancement of science. These reflections may serve to explain how it has come to pass that philosophers have made such a mighty progress in the knowledge of corporeal nature, even within little more than a century; whereas their knowledge of spiritual nature is no greater now than it was three thousand years ago, and than it will be three thousand years hence, if the generations of men continue so long.

Men were conscious, ever since their race existed, that there is an active thinking principle in their composition: and the first reflection they made, as soon as they began to reflect on what passes within them, could not fail to be this, that there is a mutual influence of body on mind which shows itself first, and of mind on body which appears a little later. With this knowledge men of common sense have contented themselves in all ages; whilst philosophers, those men of uncommon sense, have filled their own heads, and the heads of all who have hearkened to them, in every age, with fantastical ideas and notions, on which they have erected hypotheses repugnant to one another as well as to the phenomena. It would be astonishing, if it was not so common, to see men advance hypotheses sometimes with no regard, and often with very little, to those phenomena whereof we are able to acquire sensitive knowledge alone: but that they should do the same thing in cases, where every man has the same intuitive knowledge of the phenomena, might be deemed impossible and yet both are true. The distinction between sensitive and rational souls, and the immateriality of the latter, had been long established: and the schoolmen, who spun their cobwebs of philosophy as well as theology out of their own brains, had settled most accurately the bounds of each, when Des Cartes

arose: a great genius surely. The French, a little like the Greeks, "qui sua tantum mirantur," affect to speak of him as if he had first dispelled the mists of ancient philosophy, and taught mankind both to inquire and to reason. But our Verulam, as great a luminary as he, perhaps a greater one more useful certainly in the advancement of knowledge, had appeared before him to dispel these mists and to put the clue of experiment into our hands; to deride contentious logic, and to distinguish, between fantastical and real, the knowledge men had, and the knowledge they wanted, in every branch of human science. The English and the French sun both had their spots: and if they dispelled some mists, they raised others. The great obligation we have to them is, that they set us in the way of discovering their errors, as they had discovered those of other philosophers.

Des Cartes saw what the schoolmen had not seen, that a sensitive soul capable of all the functions and endued with all the faculties that they or their master Aristotle allowed to belong to it, must be capable of thinking by its nature, and therefore in every respect as well as these; and that all their distinctions were without differences, and mere arbitrary suppositions. If he had stopped here, he had defeated them, and not exposed himself to be defeated in his turn. But it did not become the majesty of his philosophy to leave any thing unaccounted for, how deeply soever hid, to speak like Pliny, in the majesty of nature. He therefore assumed two substances, the extended and the thinking substance. But as soon as he had done so, two difficulties presented themselves; one arising from the precise definition he had given of the soul, more obviously at least, if not more strongly, than from the vague notions of the peripateticians; and the other concerning the mutual action of mind on body, and of body on mind, arising as obviously and as strongly from his as from the common hypothesis, which were in effect, as to the rational soul, the same. Des Cartes, therefore, thought fit to make two other assumptions; one, that since beasts must either not think at all, or have souls like men, whose essence is thought, they should have no souls at all, but be reduced to be material automates. Such he made them: and such they continue among his disciples, as far as it is necessary they should be such to make his system consistent with that of Christian divines. It is, in truth, more favorable to them than their own; for besides other absurdities that attend the notion of a sensitive soul, the perpetual creation and annihilation of so many souls, as all the animals and insects of the world require, was a consequence that formed an objection the more against the notion. Des Cartes swept all these souls away at once, and the objection with them. The other assumption that this philosopher made, by the plenitude of his

power in hypothesis, was this; that since he had established an heterogeneity between the soul and the body, more absolute than that which there seemed to be whilst a sensitive soul was placed like a middle being between them, and since their mutual operations on one another became consequently more inconceivable than ever, this reciprocal action should be no longer admitted, however conscious of it men might imagine themselves to be. Volition, for instance, is made by this Cartesian hypothesis the occasional, not the efficient, cause of the motion of body: and the impression of an outward object on our organs is made the occasional, not the efficient, cause of the sensation that our minds perceive. God is the sole efficient cause in all these cases. He acts directly and immediately according to the laws on which he has established this strange union between soul and body. A strange union it must needs be! and one would be tempted almost to think, that it is indifferent whether the soul resides in the body it is supposed to inform, or any where else: since, united as they are, there is no immediate intercourse between them, nor any other than that which is carried on mediately by the Supreme Being, who is every where present, and may therefore be determined to act by a mind on a body, and by a body on a mind, how remote soever from one another. If we speak with the vulgar, with whom it is more reasonable to speak and to think too, than with philosophers, on some occasions, we must say that the death of Pyrrhus was the effect of a tile falling casually on his head. But if we speak with the Cartesians, we must say that the passing of Pyrrhus before the old woman's window was the occasion which determined God to make her see him; that on this second occasion, the sight of him, God impressed a sentiment of anger and vengeance on the old woman's soul; that on this third occasion, the sentiment of anger in the old woman's soul, God moved her arm to throw the tile; and that on this fourth occasion, the falling of the tile, God broke the skull of this fighting king of Epirus. This extravagant hypothesis would provoke laughter, if it did not provoke horror, as I think it must in the mind of every sincere theist.*

* Since there are those who dogmatise boldly about God's manner of being, and of knowing, it is no wonder that there should be those who dogmatise also about his manner of causing, and about the economy of his providence in the government of the world. When they assume particular providences, the instances they bring are often ridiculous: when they speak in general of occasional causes, the instances of these, which force themselves upon the mind, must needs raise horror in every man who believes a God. These doctrines are impertinent in their origin, and abominable in their consequences. If Des Cartes had not made, on his clear and distinct ideas, and his lively inward sentiment, such definitions as could not be reconciled to the universal experience of mankind, he would have been under no difficulty, except that of

The makers of hypotheses have not stopped here. Leibnitz arose after Des Cartes, and if the second did not equal the first in real, he outdid him and every other philosopher in fantastical knowledge. He rejected the old opinion, that the soul and body are so constituted and so united by God as to influence and to act really on one another. He rejected that of the French philosopher likewise, which has been just mentioned. He did not prostitute the divine agency by making God the immediate efficient cause of every effect that body seems to have on mind and mind on body, as they happen in the human system. But he employed the divine power and wisdom in another manner, and once for all as it were. According to him, every soul has a certain series of perceptions, desires, volitions, &c. Every body has a certain series of motions that are determined by the mechanical dispositions of the machine, combined with the various impressions of outward objects that may be made on it. I do not enter into the difference he makes between the human system, and the general animal system in which he supposes that the same souls have been united to the same organised bodies from the creation, and that these animals do not, properly speaking, die. In the respect in which I quote this wonderful hypothesis here, the case of all these systems is the same. In every one of them the soul and body do not correspond because they are united, but they are united because they corresponded by a pre-established harmony antecedent to their union, and in which Leibnitz found, no doubt, that sufficient reason, which is in all

owning his ignorance, in a case wherein every other philosopher was not less ignorant than he. But rather than not make a new hypothesis without a sufficient regard to the phenomena first, and rather than not maintain it even against them afterwards, the Supreme Being was brought down, "sicut Deus in machinâ," to deliver this puzzled philosopher out of the perplexity wherein he had involved himself. I would not think of God at all, though he ought to be always present to our thoughts; I would refuse to acknowledge and adore him in the contemplation of his works, though I do it from the bottom of my heart, much sooner than I would look on him as the immediate efficient cause of every sensation of human minds and every action of human bodies. Shall I believe that it is God who impresses those frantic sentiments of devotion, which an Indian idolater feels on the sight of his idol, and who determines the body of this wretch, on the occasion of these sentiments, to fall under the wheels of the processional car, and be crushed to death? Shall I believe that it is God who moves the arm of a parricide when he plunges a dagger into his father's heart, or that of some low rogue when he picks a pocket? The consequences are horrible: and an hypothesis that should lead to them, even less directly than this of Des Cartes does, would deserve to be rejected with the utmost indignation. Many of the most extravagant opinions entertained by the heathen were capable of being reconciled to an awful sense of the monarchy of a Supreme Being. Such opinions as these cannot be so: and Christian philosophers and divines have done more to debase our notions of this Being, than all the doctors of polytheism.

cases the reason that the hypothesis requires. Soul and body are united like two tallies that fitted one another before their union; but with this difference, which makes the metaphysical case the stronger, they were so fitted separately and independently of one another. Bounce felt pain when she was kicked, if Bounce was ever kicked: and so she would have felt it, if she had had no body at all in the same moment. A fair day invited you to walk in your garden; Bounce galloped after you: and so you both would have done, if you had had no souls at all. This hypothesis gives me no horror: and every time it comes into my thoughts, I laugh as if I was at a puppet-show.

That of father Malebranche must not be forgot in this place. It stands between the other two in one respect: it is neither so horrible as the first, nor so comical as the last. But it is I think the strongest instance that can be produced of a fine genius wrought up to a degree of madness by metaphysical speculation and hypothetical enthusiasm, unless the African bishop St. Austin may be compared with him. Malebranche then specifies certain manners in which we may have ideas of outward objects, the first of which is agreeable to the phenomena and to the common notion derived from them, and the last of which is his own wild hypothesis. He even ventures to assert that there is no other manner in which we can have ideas of these objects. The assertion is a bold one; since it assumes that God cannot ordain any system of body and mind which we cannot comprehend.—On this foundation he proceeds to show how insufficient all the other ways are of accounting for these ideas, and to introduce his own. If I was to enter into a detail of particulars, it would be easy to show, with the help of Mr. Locke's examination, and even without this help, that the hypothesis consists of little else than words that have absolutely no meaning, than figurative expressions that cannot be applied to his subject without the utmost absurdity, than inconsistences and palpable contradictions. But I believe this will appear to be no unjust charge, even by the very little I shall say. His hypothesis in short is this. We cannot perceive any thing that is not intimately united to our souls. Our souls are unextended beings in this place, though in another he says they have extension, a narrow one indeed; but narrow or broad it is still extension. Now there being no proportion between the soul and material things, these cannot be united to it, nor consequently be perceived by it. Our souls are indeed united to our bodies; but there is a manner of union necessary to perception, and another not so, neither of which is explained. God, who is a substance, and the only intelligible substance, is intimately united to our souls by his presence. He is the place of spirits, as space is in one sense the

place of bodies: and since he must have in himself the ideas of all the beings he has created, (for without these ideas, that is, without our manner of knowing, this philosopher presumes to affirm that he could not have created them,) we may see these ideas in God, as he is pleased to show them to us: but the good father having no where explained how God shows them to us, he leaves us in the same ignorance in which he found us. It has been observed that this hypothesis bears some resemblance to that of Democritus, who assumed that our ideas are God. One idea, that which we have of God, is, I am sure, by this hypothesis, God himself; since it is affirmed that this idea is uncreated. The words are worth quoting. "On ne peut pas concevoir que l'idée d'un être infiniment parfait, qui est celle que nous avons de Dieu, soit quelque chose de crée." I might mention a multitude of other notions quite unintelligible or repugnant to our clearest ideas and most certain experience; such as these, for instance, that we have the idea of infinite before we have the idea of finite, and that we think of all being before we think of any particular being; but I have said enough to show that although this writer has destroyed the intentional species of the peripatetics, (for he dwells chiefly on our ideas of sight,) yet he has left it just as possible, and vastly more probable, that God has ordained certain ideas in the mind to be excited by certain motions of body, in a manner incomprehensible by us, than that we see these ideas in his substance in a manner alike incomprehensible.

I imagine that the plain man is by this time pleased to see common sense force men back, after a tedious round of philosophical rambles, to the very point from which he has never stirred; for so it must do unless we renounce this gift of God, in favor of human authority. The authority may be great; but the greater it is the more strongly do these examples of error show how little the greatest, how absurd the wildest, how ignorant the most learned of men become, when they presume to push beyond the bounds that God has set to human inquiries. There is so much warning given, the high road to knowledge is so direct, and the bounds of it are so strongly marked, that they who go out of this road in the vain hope of passing them by a shorter way, as well as they who do not stop when they are conducted no longer by the phenomena, but hope that metaphysics can carry them forward when physics cannot, are inexcusable.

Fontenelle, in the elogy he made of Newton before the French Academy, compares Des Cartes with him. He says that, "Des Cartes, taking a bold flight, meant to place himself at the source of all things, and to make himself master of the first principles of

them by some clear and fundamental ideas, that he might have nothing more to do than to descend from thence down to the phenomena of nature as to necessary consequences. He says that the other, more timid or more modest, set out leaning on the phenomena, that he might by their means remount to the unknown principles of things, which he resolved to admit whatever the chain of consequences showed them to be. One, says he, sets out from what he understands clearly, to find the cause of what he sees. The other sets out from what he sees, to discover the cause, be it plain or obscure. He concludes by saying that the evident principles of one do not always lead him to the phenomena such as they are, and the phenomena do not always lead the other to principles evident enough." I have quoted this passage at length; because, as much perplexed as it is by an artful abuse of words, it will serve much better to set in a full light the truth I would inculcate, than to constitute an equality of merit in natural philosophy between Des Cartes and Newton. I will make, therefore, a short commentary on it. The design of the former, as it is here represented, was not a bold flight, but an extravagent undertaking. It is honor enough to the latter, that he made greater advances towards the first principles of things than any of those who went before him: and this would have been honor enough for Des Cartes too, if he could have acquired it. This philosopher might have clear ideas; for ideas that are false may be very clear perceptions in the mind, and especially in the mind of one who reasoned on a certain lively inward sentiment of evidence, as well as on ideas really clear and distinct. But fundamental ideas, if there be any meaning in the word, he could have none, or none that were sufficient in the method he pursued. Many of those he employed to make himself master of the first principles of things could be only hypothetical, since he did not frame them on the phenomena, nor connect them by the phenomena, according to Newton's method; which was not timid, but wise as well as modest. What an immense distance was there between any thing he could understand clearly in his method, and the causes of what he saw? And how could the intermediate ideas be framed? Nay, how does it appear that he understood clearly the things which he is said to have understood so, and from which he set out, when he took extension alone to constitute the essence of matter, and thought alone that of soul? Is it not plain that his evident principles were assumed, as they often are, purely for the sake of what was to follow? Des Cartes might in his method invent, as he did, whatever principles imagination suggested to him, and with the ostentatious appearance of a complete system show us a universe of his own, not of God's making. Newton resolved

to invent none; for he resolved to admit such only as he should be led to discover by a chain of consequences that carried him up to them, imperfectly perhaps but surely; such as God made them to be, not such as he guessed they might be. The one might and did fall into error. The other could only fall short of the knowledge he sought. He fell short of it. Like Columbus, he discovered a new world: and like him, he left the discovery to be pursued by others. Our knowledge of nature can so little be complete that the very appearance of a complete system is a reason perhaps to suspect it of being etched out by fancy. Let us suppose a philosopher to arise and to pursue the discoveries of Newton with equal success. Let us suppose that, by dint of experiment and geometry, he confirms the doctrine of attraction or gravitation not as a property, not as an attribute of matter if you will, but barely as a new phenomenon, and that he discovers a new kind of pulsion or some other physical cause of it. Attraction, which gives us now the idea of a cause, and which may be, notwithstanding all the silly abstract reasoning to the contrary, a real property of matter, will give us then the idea of an effect, as this new cause must do in its turn as soon as some further cause is discovered; and as that further cause must do likewise as soon as some other still more remote is brought into light. Thus we shall be always seeking, and always to seek. But is this to recall the occult qualities of the schools? Fontenelle makes himself, not Newton, ridiculous, when he does more than insinuate this reproach in the same elogy. If Newton's philosophy had terminated, like that of the scholastics, in occult qualities, it would not have risen in reputation as fast as it was understood: and if that of Des Cartes had not been too often, like theirs, merely hypothetical and extravagantly so, it had not been demolished on so many sides as fast as it was examined.

But I return to observe, that the comparison between these two methods is to be applied to our researches about spiritual as well as corporeal nature, and to confirm what I have said concerning them. When I consider how little knowledge the phenomena give us of one, and that we are not able to go by their help a step beyond the first appearances, whilst we extend our knowledge of the other wider and carry it higher in the order of causes; I am ready to think that God, who leaves us in many cases to collect his will, as he has made us able to collect it, from his works, shows manifestly in this case how repugnant it is to the designs of his all-wise providence that we should attempt to acquire knowledge of soul or spirit, and how conformable it is to these designs that we should employ our industry and penetration to acquire knowledge of body, terrestrial and celestial; in order to promote in general the advantages of human life, and

those particularly that result from an adoration of the Supreme Being in a contemplation of his works.

It has been said, it is a common-place topic, that Infidels, for such is every one called by some men who does not subscribe to all they advance even without proof, are desirous to keep God at a distance from them, whereas they ought to consider that it is "in him they live and move and have their being." This charge cannot be laid justly against any man who believes a God; for a God without the attributes of an all-perfect Being cannot be the Supreme Being, how inconsistently soever some of the ancients might reason about the Divinity. For my own part, I am firmly persuaded that there is a Supreme Being, the fountain of all existence, by the efficacy of whose will the whole universe was made and is governed as well as preserved; in a word, who is the first efficient cause of all things and on whom all his creatures depend. But for this very reason, and because I have this awful sense of the Supreme Being, I do not presume to familiarise myself with him, as the men who bring this charge are apt to do. That he is the first efficient cause, I acknowledge; but I am on my guard against those who presume to penetrate further into the machinery of the universe, and the order of second causes, than the phenomena, that is, than his works, shed a light on their inquiries: or who are so bold as to deny the efficiency of second causes, because they are not able to account for them, and who employ the first canse on every occasion, for whose action they are as little able to account. This is a common practice, and it has produced a sort of profane and even blasphemous enthusiasm in philosophy. Des Cartes, Leibnitz, Malebranche, our friend perhaps, and all those who not contented to know, what they may know in some degree, the things that are, make hypotheses of what they can know in no degree, how and why these things are as they are; all these men, I say, have run into this practice, and have spread the enthusiasm.

Our inquiries into the nature of things and into their causes may be stopped in two different manners. They may be stopped or delayed by the difficulties that are in the way, or by the want of some of those extraordinary geniuses that are sent into the world, now and then, to penetrate into the secrets of nature, and to unfold them, as it were, by degrees. Few of these men arise. They are as rare as comets, or any of the less frequent phenomena that they observe: and when one of them has made a certain progress, if he is not interrupted in it by death, it often happens that he stops in his philosophical career, as if his strength were spent. The course is long as well as difficult. Relays are necessary, if I may say so, to carry knowledge even to the human goal: and they are not always at hand. When inquiries are

thus stopped, and yet the progress that has been made shows that which remains to be made, other men are encouraged to proceed: lucky incidents may happen to shorten their labor, and the intended discovery may seem to be only delayed. This is, I suppose, the case of the longitude: and we cannot doubt but that it is so of many other objects of philosophical inquiry.

But our progress is absolutely stopped, instead of being delayed only, in many more instances: and in these it is that all efforts are vain, and all industry for that reason impertinent. I will explain myself on this important point as clearly as I can. Besides the general idea we have of a universal relation of cause and effect between the Supreme Being and his works, all the phenomena give us particular ideas of the same relation. It is evidently in the system of divine wisdom that they should do so; and the use of it in all the affairs of human life is manifest. Every phenomenon is a cause to us, when it is considered relatively to those that appear to be the effects of it. Every phenomenon is an effect to us, when it is considered relatively to those that appear to be the causes of it. Thus God has willed that things should be perceived by us: and if we could discover the whole chain up to the first effects of Almighty efficacy, such they would appear, I presume, to us. But humanity cannot soar so high, nor approach so near the throne of God; though the Sieur De Fontenelle assures us, that Des Cartes took his flight thither, at least, since he directed it to the source and to the first principles of all being. As far as we can acquire ideas of the phenomena, and are able to compare them, and to proceed by induction from them, so far, and so far only, are we able to acquire the knowledge we are so fond of, the knowledge of causes, of corporeal causes, that I may keep to the usual distinction, from the corporeal phenomena, and of spiritual causes from the spiritual phenomena. When we can acquire no more of these ideas we are at the end of our line of knowledge in either kind: and as this happens sometimes after a long process of inquiry, so it happens sometimes at our first setting out.

But this is not all. As our discoveries of the phenomena, by which we acquire ideas of second causes, are thus variously limited, so there is another uniform and universal limitation of our knowledge concerning them. Whatever knowledge we acquire of apparent causes, we can acquire none of real causality, by which I mean neither mode nor modal entity, according to the jargon of the schools, but plainly that force, that power, that virtue, whatever it be, by which one being acts on another, and becomes a cause. We may call this by different names, according to the different effects of it; but to know it in its first principles, to know the nature of it, would be to know as God him-

self knows, and, therefore, this will be always unknown to us in causes that seem to be most under our inspection, as well as in those that are the most remote from it. This knowledge, however, is that which philosophers mean to attain, or it is impossible to say what they mean in many cases, and for want of which they employ so familiarly the first efficient cause on every turn. They are doubly ridiculous. They seek and pretend to discover causes when they only suppose phenomena; and when they have discovered a real actual cause in its effects by the phenomena, they reject it because they cannot conceive its causality, nor assign a sufficient reason why and how it is as it is.

If all the objections to Newton's system were answered; if the facts and calculations were over and over confirmed, a disciple of Leibnitz would still maintain that there was no sufficient reason for attraction as an essential property, or as an attribute of matter: and that it could not, therefore, be admitted as a cause, how much soever appearances might favor such an opinion; since nothing must be admitted to exist unless philosophers are able to show the sufficient reason of its existence, and to explain its causality. Well might attraction be exploded by these philosophers, since extension itself run some risk, and had been certainly denied to be an essential property of matter, if Leibnitz had not discovered the sufficient reason of it in non-extension. His monades in this system may be called immaterial atoms, as properly as he calls souls immaterial automates in his system of a pre-established harmony: and his reasoning in both will appear intelligible to none but his implicit disciples; as his letter to the chemists who searched for the philosopher's stone at Nuremberg, which procured him admission into their society, was intelligible to them, though he did not understand it himself.

It will be agreed, I think, that, on the supposition I have made above, attraction would pass, in every mind untouched by the delirium of metaphysics, for a sufficient cause; though the sufficient reason of it could not be given, nor the causality of it be explained. Now I would ask whether the conscious knowledge we have of the reciprocal action of body and mind be not founded in greater certainty than the knowledge we should have of this *conatus accedendi*, this mutual tendency of body to body? It must be allowed to be so. I would ask, therefore, since he who should deny in this case the attracting, gravitating power to be a property of matter would deserve laughter instead of attention, as much as he did whilst he doubted in the same manner of extension, till the sagacious Leibnitz had found the sufficient reason of it in non-extension, or rather in non-entity; I would ask, I say, what he deserves who denies the reciprocal action of mind and body, because he knows no more than that

there is such an action, and because he is unable to discover by what powers, and in what manner this action is produced?

If we are conscious that we think at all, we are conscious that we perceive ideas, and that we will actions. We are conscious, in one case, that the cause is without us, and the effect within us. We are equally conscious, in the other, that the cause is within us, and that the effect passes without us. In one case, where we have only a sensitive knowledge of the cause, though we have an intuitive knowledge of the effect, we may be deceived as to the former. The stick in the water may be straight, though we perceived it crooked: and the tower at a great distance from us may be square, though we perceived it round. I choose these trite examples which have been employed by all those who would persuade us to distrust our senses, those inlets of all our knowledge, and which prove for me, on this occasion, better than for them on the occasion on which they urge them. We try our perceptions over and over again; we rectify by experience the deceptions to which they are liable: and all these perceptions, the false as well as the true, confirm the opinion, if it may be called merely an opinion, that they are caused immediately by outward objects acting on our organs, whether we will or no, in consequence of particular principles or powers utterly unknown to us, and conformably to general laws, some of which we are able to discover. In the other case, where we have intuitive knowledge of the cause, and only sensitive knowledge of the effect, either we have really no knowledge at all, and our whole system is a system of illusion which it would be surely impious to assert; or we know that there is an immediate action or influence, which amounts to the same, of mind on body. No man in his senses ever doubted, and I am therefore persuaded that Des Cartes did not doubt, that volition, an act of the mind, determined the motion of his arms and legs whenever he moved them; though the interest of his hypothesis, which concerns all these men much more than that of truth, obliged him to maintain the contrary, as it obliged him to advance the other paradox mentioned above concerning animal automates.

Thus have philosophers in all ages amused mankind with systems of imaginary knowledge, raised on fantastical ideas and notions, rather than confine themselves within the limits of real knowledge. Instead of fixing our opinions by evident truth, and giving the mind any solid foundation whereon to rest, they have involved us in doubts, and eternised dispute. Like Noctambules, they have staggered about, and jostled one another in their dreams. Since the torch of experimental philosophy has been lighted up, these hypothetical reasonings have been exploded, or else confined under certain conditions in all that relates to corpo-

real nature. But the abuse has continued in all that relates to spiritual nature: and modern philosophers, like tyrants driven out of one province, have made themselves amends, as it were, by exercising a more arbitrary power in another. The exercise of it in this deserves, however, to be restrained more than in the former. The spiritual nature of our souls, such as it is now conceived to be, such as authority, and among others that of a council, obliges that it should be taught, is a hypothesis assumed on very precarious grounds, and in opposition to those that are the grounds of every other allowable hypothesis. How absurd therefore is it in philosophers to assume on a hypothesis much more than they would venture to assume on real knowledge? How absurd is it in the rest of mankind to give any credit to them when they do so?

But there is a further objection to this proceeding drawn from the unavoidable consequences of it, which should render it odious to every man, who will not sacrifice the integrity of theism to the artifice of minds fraught with vanity, and stimulated by curiosity. The notion, which these metaphysical reasoners have framed about the human soul or spirit, makes them slide easily and almost necessarily into that familiarity with the father of spirits which has been censured above, into conclusions, little less, if at all less, than blasphemous. Whilst philosophers talked of corporeal nature logically, that is, improperly, or on supposed principles of matter and motion, that is, ignorantly, they led themselves and others into error, but not into such error. Metaphysicians and divines have this to answer for. Spirit is not certainly an univocal term, though these men use it as such. God is not a system of matter; but he is not therefore a spirit, such as we conceive spirits to be: he is not therefore united to our souls by an inconceivable presence or union, nor even by any gradation of spirits up to him; for between him and the highest created being the distance must be still infinite. Thus we should think and speak of God. But the men we have to do with here have accustomed themselves to think in the same manner, and to speak in the same style, of the divine and human spirit, with no other difference than that of adding infinite to the one, and finite to the other. They conceive them both to be alike immaterial beings, and substances too, as if they, or Des Cartes, who determined that there are but two substances, knew this any better than Spinoza knew that there is but one, or than I, who believe there may be several, know how many, or what they are. It is no wonder that such notions of a community, or union of spirits between God and man, should encourage metaphysicians and divines to draw the Deity down to their level, as their several hypotheses require, whilst they affect to raise themselves up to

his, if I may be allowed to use expressions which are no more than proper to signify their attempts. They do in effect spiritualise all the gross conceptions of ignorant and superstitious men, that is, they say much the same things in a less intelligible manner: and the presence of God, according to Malebranche, and according to Moses, differs in little else. Besides which, if we believe what they affirm, Malebranche had in the Word, or God's eternal reason, an invisible, and the high priest of the Jews in the tabernacle a visible, Shecinah to interrogate.

After all these reflections which I have thrown upon paper as they occurred to my thoughts, and as the frequent interruptions to which I am exposed would give me leave, nay, after all those which they suggest, or which a man of better parts, more knowledge, and more leisure, would be able to make, I doubt not but our plain man would be told that the hypotheses which have been mentioned deserve much respect, notwithstanding all that has been said against them, since they were intended to support the opinion of the immateriality and immortality of the soul, and by consequence of the rewards and punishments of a future state, which are the great bonds that attach men to revealed religion. This he would be told, and he would be asked whether he presumes to deny the truth of these doctrines in general, whatever he may think of some particular notions that philosophers may have entertained concerning them? His answer might be to this effect, that it would be for the interest of these and several other doctrines to let them rest on the authority of revelation; that to make them matter of philosophical speculation is to make them disputable, and that to make them disputable is to unfix them in the minds of men; since in the natural order of things revelation may confirm what philosophy teaches; but philosophy can give no confirmation, nor any further authority to what revelation has taught; and since, if it could do so in other cases, it could not do it in these, where questions that have been controverted in all ages among philosophers are concerned. He might add that, revelation apart, he saw no positive nor determining proof of any of these doctrines; that all the phenomena from our birth to our death seem repugnant to the immateriality and immortality of the soul, that he is forced to conclude with Lucretius,

> "——— gigni pariter cum corpore, et unà
> Crescere, sentimus, pariterque senescere mentem."

that God had given him reason to distinguish and to judge, and external and internal sense by which to perceive and to reflect: but that this very reason showed him the absurdity of embracing an opinion concerning body and mind which neither of these

senses supports; that how short and imperfect soever the knowledge acquired by observation of the phenomena might be, he was contented with it, because it was knowledge acquired in God's way, that is, in the only way God has opened to our inquiries about the nature of things corporeal or spiritual: nay further, that if he could suspect himself to be deceived in this way, he would be contented still; he would conclude on this and other occasions, that whether things appear to him as they are absolutely, and such as the supreme intelligence knows them to be, or not, they appear to him such as it is fit for his nature that they should appear to him. On this undoubted truth he would rest his mind, instead of perplexing it about indeterminable questions, and of struggling presumptuously and vainly to know things otherwise than his nature and theirs admit that he should know them.

On such principles as these, though he could not affirm, he would not deny, the immortality of the soul. What indeed should tempt him to do so? In whatever world, in whatever state he is, he knows that the same God governs. What then has he to fear in one more than in another? Nothing surely, if he thinks as he ought to think of the all-perfect Being. Such God is. Let us not therefore humanise him. Let us not measure his perfections by ours, much less let us ascribe to him, as every system of theology does, under the notion of goodness, what would be partiality, nor under the notion of justice what would be cruelty in man. Let us not presume so much as to ascribe our perfections to him, even according to the highest conceptions we are able to frame of them, though we reject every imperfection conceivable by us, when it is imputed to him. "As we must not imagine with the Anthropomorphites (it is Malebranche* who speaks well in this place, though very inconsistently with what he says in others,) that God has the human figure, because it seems to us the most perfect; we must not think neither that the mind of God has human thoughts, nor that it is like to ours, because we know nothing more perfect than our own minds." Such theology as this, and surely it is orthodox, makes our plain man to be flattered, not terrified, with any faint appearance of immortality in prospect, like Tully, Seneca, and other philosophers, who saw no more grounds in any thing they knew of the nature of the soul for this expectation, than he sees. He is ready to say of this immortality, what the auditor says in the first Tusculan disputation, "me verò delectat; idque primum ita esse velim, deinde, etiamsi non sit, mihi tamen persuaderi velim."

* Lib. 3, p. 2, c. 9.

He might very reasonably ask the metaphysical divine for what reason he clogs the belief of the soul's immortality with that of its immateriality, since the former is sufficient to answer all the ends of religion? The doctrine of future rewards and punishments (which is, no doubt, a great restraint on men, and which would be a greater, if it was not so scandalously abused by the ambition and avarice of priests) supposes the immortality of the soul only: and it is much more easy to make men conceive that it is immortal by the good pleasure of God, though material, than that it is an immaterial spirit, and immortal by the necessity of its nature, as God is self-existent by the necessity of his. One may wonder that men, who have adopted so many of the whimsical notions which they found in Plato, should not have borrowed a hint they might have found there, or that they rejected perhaps when they found it. The hint I mean is, that of souls mortal by their nature, that is, material, but such as should never die. "Solubiles, sed dissolvendæ nunquam." "Since you are generated, you are mortal, but you shall not die; for my will is strong enough to repair the defects of your nature," says the Supreme Being to the younger gods, the gods born of gods in the Timæus; and it is the least absurd thing Plato makes him say or do on that occasion. The neglect of this passage may be imputed to some theological purposes that seem to be better served by the hypothesis of immaterial souls, than by any other. But the vanity of the human heart, which has been flattered by divines in all ages, was to be flattered on. What served best to this purpose was taken from Plato: and how it was improved we need look no further than Tusculan, just now quoted, to find. There Tully, after a ridiculous panegyric on the human mind, which improved by philosophy he thinks able to discover all things in heaven and on earth, all that exists, in its beginning, progression, and end, runs a very profane parallel between the divine and human mind. If the first "be air or fire, such is the last." If there be a fifth element, that new nature which "Aristotle first introduced, it must be common to both. Whatever has sense, intelligence, will, and the principles of life, is celestial and divine, and therefore necessary and eternal." This is the nature of man: and "God himself cannot be conceived any other way," than by analogy to it. That we frame our conceptions of the divine intelligence as well as we can, by analogy to our own, is true. We have no other way of framing them. But it will not follow that his nature is analogous to ours, nor that ours is like his, "Mens soluta quædem et libera, segregata ab omni concretione mortali, omnia sentiens et movens, ipsaque prædita motu sempiterno." Thus absurdly however did the disciples of Plato flatter human nature: and finding in the Bible that we are made

after the image of God, our divines have interpreted the passage according to these prejudices. They will not say directly, I suppose, that our souls are a portion of the divine essence, but what they say sometimes means this or nothing, and what they say always is but little different from it. Strange vanity! as they assume themselves to be exposed to eternal damnation, and the rest of mankind to be almost entirely damned, rather than to assume that their souls are immortal; so this immortality would not have charms sufficient for them, if it was not asserted to be essential to the nature of their souls.

Thus, I believe, our plain man would leave the matter: and thus I leave it too; having said, I hope, enough to show that the fondness philosophers have to raise hypotheses that cannot be raised on real ideas, such as have a known foundation in nature, that is, a known conformity with existence, is a principal occasion on which the mind exercises its artifice in framing such ideas and notions as are merely fantastical. That the mind exercises the same several other ways, and in some less obviously than in this, as it has been hinted above, I know full well. But, enough having been said to show that human knowledge is imperfect and precarious in its original, as well as slow and confined in its progress, and by one great example, which may serve *instar omnium*, that they, who pretend to guide the reason of mankind and to improve human knowledge, do nothing better in matters of the first philosophy, than substitute that which is imaginary in the place of that which is real, or in addition to it, in favor of their prejudices, their passions, and their interests; enough has been said for an essay concerning the Nature, Extent, and Reality of Human Knowledge.

ESSAY THE SECOND:

CONTAINING SOME

REFLECTIONS ON THE FOLLY AND PRESUMPTION OF PHILOSOPHERS, ESPECIALLY IN MATTERS OF THE FIRST PHILOSOPHY;

ON THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THEIR BOASTED SCIENCE;

ON THE PROPAGATION OF ERROR AND SUPERSTITION;

AND ON THE PARTIAL ATTEMPTS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE TO REFORM THE ABUSES OF HUMAN REASON.

SECTION I.

He who asserts that there would be more real knowledge and more true wisdom among mankind, if there was less learning and less philosophy, may offend some men's ears by advancing a paradox; for such at least they will call it. But men who inquire without prejudice, and who dare to doubt, will soon discover that this seeming paradox is a most evident truth. They will find it such in almost every part of human science, and above all others in that which is called metaphysical and theological. The vanity of the vainest man alive, of some who call themselves scholars and philosophers, will be hurt; but they who seek truth without any other regard, and who prefer therefore very wisely even ignorance to error, will rejoice at every such discovery.

There was a time when navigators bent themselves obstinately to find a passage by the northeast or the northwest to Cathay. Neither frequent losses nor constant disappointment could divert them from these enterprises, as long as the fashionable folly prevailed. The passage was not found; the fashion wore out, and

the folly ceased. The bounds of navigation were set: and sufficient warning was both given and taken against any further attempts in those dark and frozen regions. Many such there are in the intellectual world: and many such attempts have been made there with no better success. But the consequence has not been the same. Neither examples nor experience have had their effect on philosophers, more fool-hardy than mariners: and where the former wandered to no purpose three thousand years ago, they wander to no purpose, at least to no good purpose, still.

"Il faut pousser à une porte pour sçavoir qu'elle nous est close," says Charron, somewhere in his Book of Wisdom. He says right, "pour sçavoir qu'elle nous est close." But when we know, or may know very certainly, by our own experience, and by that of all the strong men in philosophy, ancients and moderns, that a door is shut which no human force can open, they who continue to sweat and toil in shoving at it are most ridiculously employed. They who affect to guess at the objects they cannot see, and to talk as if the door stood wide open while they peep through the key hole, are employed still worse. The most ancient philosophers may be excused in great measure for attempting to open every door of science; though they cannot be so for imposing on mankind discoveries they never made. But they who followed these, in the course of philosophical generations, are inexcusable on the first head as well as the last; since what was curiosity in the others became presumption in them: and they scarcely made amends, by the good they did in advancing some real knowledge, for the hurt they did in entailing so much that is quite fantastical on posterity.

Tully confesses very frankly that nothing is so absurd which some philosopher or other has not said: and his own works would furnish sufficient proofs of the assertion, under the Epicurean, the Stoical, and the Academical characters particularly, if they were wanted. But this confession does not go far enough; and we may employ upon this occasion against philosophers the objection made against the Jesuits by some of their enemies. The absurdities of philosophers are not to be ascribed to the particular men alone who broached them in every philosophical age, but to their order and institution, if I may say so; the principles and spirit of which lead by necessary consequences to such absurdities. The first founders of philosophy laid these principles, and inspired this spirit in days of ignorance and superstition. Their followers have refined upon them, confirmed them, and added to them. Time and authority have established them all; the oldest and the grossest most. Words that have really no meaning are thought to have one, and are used accordingly.

Ideas, that are really incomplete and inadequate, are deemed complete and adequate. Ideas, that are obscure and confused, are deemed clear and distinct. In a word, time and authority have so well established metaphysical and theological absurdities, that they pass for the first principles of science, like certain necessary and self-evident truths which are really such. Men, who would have been giants in the human sphere, have dwindled into pigmies by going out of it. Instead of heaping mountains on mountains of knowledge to scale the sky, they heap mole-hills on mole-hills with great airs of importance, and boast ridiculously not only of their design, but of their success. They appear to me like sylphs, if you and Ariel will give me leave to make the comparison, so proud of not being gnomes that they fancy themselves archangels. "Humana ad deos transferunt, divina mallem ad nos," is an expression used by Tully, and extremely applicable to the philosophers of whom we are speaking. They do most presumptuously the first, and they pretend with equal folly and effrontery to do the last. They ascribe to the Supreme Being the manner of knowing the ideas, and even the very affections and passions of his creatures. They presume to enter into his councils, and to account for the whole divine economy, as confidently as they would for any of their own paltry affairs. This they call theology. They build intellectual and material worlds on the hypothetical suggestions of imagination. This they call philosophy, metaphysical and physical.

By such means, and by such men, truth and error have been intimately blended together from the first essays of philosophical inquiry: and various systems of natural and supernatural theology have prevailed in different ages. Had any one of them been wholly founded in real knowledge and confined to it, as every one of them pretended to be, the certainty and the importance of such a system would have preserved it among the rational part of mankind. Truth, pure and unmixed, would have given it stability. But error has kept them all in a continual flux: and to the shame of the human head and heart, the most rational, or the most reasoning, part of mankind has maintained this flux by adopting some errors, by inventing others, and by cultivating both.

If there is no subject, and I think there is none, upon which the opinions of men have varied so extravagantly, and have stood in such manifest contradiction to one another, as they have on that of the first philosophy, the reason is, that men have not aimed so much at unattainable knowledge, nor pretended so much to it, on any other subject. Folly and knavery have prevailed most where they should be tolerated least: and presump-

tion has been exercised most where diffidence and caution are on many accounts the most necessary.

> "Quale per incertam lunam sub luce malignâ
> Est iter in silvis."——

Such is our journey in the acquisition of knowledge, whenever we attempt to travel far. We grope along in those paths which experience and the application of our minds open to us. We discern, according to our manner of perception, a few objects that lie in our way, and we guess at a few more. But we cannot even guess, with as much probability as is necessary to justify us in guessing, at our whole system, nor explain the phenomena of it. How much less ought we to think ourselves capable of knowing the divine system! We have a very superficial acquaintance with man. Do we hope to become better acquainted with God? One would imagine that metaphysical divines did really entertain this hope. They may entertain it, as well as the huffing opinions, to use a phrase of Mr. Locke, which they entertain concerning the human mind or soul. They assume it to be near akin to the divine, something derived immediately from God, and capable of being united to him. An intellectual mirror it is, that reflects from the phenomena of nature alone, and therefore indirectly, some very few notices of the Supreme Being, beyond the demonstrative knowledge that we have of his existence. But these men, when they lower their pretensions and would appear modest, assume it to be not a mirror that reflects such notices, but a spirit that is capable of receiving them, and that receives them directly from the divine intelligence. They tell us, with great metaphysical pomp of words, that reason, the supreme eternal reason, is the sun of their intellectual world, in the light of which they see intelligible objects, just as sensible objects are seen in that of the material sun. On such bold presumptions they proceed, and whither may they not, whither have they not, been carried by them? The further they go, the more their imaginary light fails them. But they cease not to flatter themselves; and whilst they expect at every moment, as it were, the dawn of a new day, they fall into the shades of night.

> ——"Ubi cœlum condidit umbrâ
> Jupiter, et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem."

Now since metaphysical divines have wandered thus so many thousand years in imaginary light and real darkness, they are not surely the guides we should choose to follow. That a degree of knowledge to which I cannot attain is therefore unattainable by them, it would be impertinent to conclude. But I may conclude reasonably and modestly, that a kind of knowledge, whose

objects lie above the reach of humanity, cannot be attained by human creatures unless they are assisted by supernatural powers, which is a supposition out of the present case. I could not have discovered, as Newton did, that universal law of corporeal nature which he has demonstrated. But further than that he could go, no more than I, nor discover that action of the first cause by which this law was imposed on all bodies, and is maintained in them. It is the kind, not the degree of knowledge that is concerned, and to be compared. Let us return therefore out of this scene of illusion into that of human knowledge; nor flutter, as Hobbes expresses himself, like birds at the window whilst we remain inclosed. We may be the better contented to confine our inquiries to the limits God has prescribed to them, since we may find within those limits abundant matter of real use and ornament to employ the studious labors of mankind. Experimental knowledge of body and mind is the fund our reason should cultivate: and the first is a fund that philosophers will never exhaust. In this part, let deficiencies be noted. There are, there can be no excesses: and as to the excesses that have been and are to be noted in the other, they are excesses of assuming and reasoning, not of experiment and observation. The phenomena of the human mind are few, and on those few a multitude of hypotheses has been raised, concerning mind in general, and soul and spirit. So that in this part, the improvement of real knowledge must be made by contraction, and not by amplification. I will presume to say, that if our Bacon had thought and written as freely on this as he did on many other parts of science, his famous work, which has contributed so much, would have contributed more, to the advancement of real knowledge, and would have deserved its title better. Men might have learned to consider body more, instead of doubting whether it exists, and to consider their own minds more, from which alone they can acquire any ideas at all of mind; instead of dreaming like Malebranche that they interrogate the divine Logos.

What right the first observers of nature and instructors of mankind had to the title of sages we cannot say. It was due perhaps more to the ignorance of the scholars, than to the knowledge of the masters. But this we may venture to affirm, that their right to that appellation could not be worse founded than the right of all their successors to be called lovers of wisdom. There is an anecdote related by Tully in his fifth Tusculan, and mentioned, I think, by Diogenes Laertius, which is much to our present purpose: or at least the tale is pretty enough to deserve to be told. The prince of the Phliasians having heard and admired the Samian, asked him what his profession was. He answered, that he was a philosopher, and he explained himself thus: He

said, that the life of man seemed to him to resemble the great assembly or fair of Greece that was held at Olympia, where some resorted to acquire honor by exercising themselves in the public games, and others wealth by traffic; whilst another sort of men came for a much better reason, to see and to observe whatever passed. Thus, he said, some men come into the world to seek glory, and some wealth; whilst a few, despising both, observe and study nature: and these are lovers of wisdom. We might be induced by this tale to think that Pythagoras confined himself within the bounds of real knowledge, if we did not know, by a multitude of other anecdotes, and by the scraps of his doctrine that have come down to us, how far he rambled out of them. He had been bred in schools where the distinction between human and divine knowledge and wisdom, to one of which we may attain, but not to the other, was so little made, that by aiming at the last, they missed in many respects even the former. To observe the constitution and order of things in the physical and moral systems to which we belong, to form general ideas, notions, axioms and rules on these particulars, and to apply them back again to human action and human use, constitutes knowledge: and the result of the whole is wisdom, human knowledge and human wisdom. But there are men, and there were such in the days of Pythagoras, who talk of wisdom as if it was not the result of any procedure of this kind, but a superior principle antecedent to it, independent of human knowledge, and the influences whereof descend on the human mind from above, as Christian theology teaches us that grace and faith are bestowed on us.

According to such philosophers as these, men of great authority in our learned world, we must date the progress of knowledge and wisdom from Adam, who was the wisest of men, if it be no blunder to say so, before the fall, and the first and greatest philosopher after it. I will not misspend any time in collecting the puerilities and profanations that have fallen from the pens of rabbins, and ancient and modern doctors of the Christian church. It will be enough, and in truth more than the subject deserves, to take notice, that if we give credit to these writers, we must believe that wisdom was infused into the mind of Adam by God, and that he came out of the hands of his Creator with all the perfections of which his nature was susceptible: and of what perfections was not that nature susceptible, whilst he enjoyed the vision of God, and whilst the Supreme Wisdom, that is God himself, "for the Word is God," was pleased to converse with him, and was delighted in his company?* He had not only in-

* —— ludens in orbe terrarum; et deliciæ meæ, esse cum filiis hominum. Prov. c. 8, v. 31.

nate wisdom, but innate language too; for Adam and Eve discoursed together in Hebrew as soon as they were created. Even after the fall, Adam preserved all the knowledge and wisdom whereof he was in possession, though more obscurely than before; because he had no longer the same immediate and intimate communication with the Supreme Intelligence. It should seem too, that he transmitted some faint glimmerings of these original illuminations to all his posterity. Plato imagined, after more ancient philosophers, that every man is born with a certain reminiscence, and that when we seem to be taught, we are only put in mind of what we knew in a former state. Now who can tell how high this reminiscence began, and through how many former states it may have been continued! Several Christian divines have taught, that all men having been contained in the first man, some of his original perfection has descended to them, as well as the taint of his original sin: and we may conceive one, no doubt, as easily as the other.

But however all this may have been, and whether Adam preserved after the fall his whole stock of knowledge and wisdom, or whether he renewed it by experience and meditation in the course of a long life, the progress of knowledge and wisdom is deduced by the same writers from him to Seth, to Enoch, to Noah, to the patriarchs, to Moses, to Solomon, to the elders of Israel, to the priests of the family of Aaron, to the colleges of the prophets, to those sanctified orders the Rechabites and the Essenians, and in short to all the schools of the chosen people both before and after the captivity. Among this people we are told most dogmatically, that the whole treasure of knowledge and wisdom, as well as of true religion, was deposited by God, that it was preserved there, and that some of these riches were distributed from thence at different periods of time to the rest of mankind: so that the people of the whole earth lighted up their candles at the lamp of the tabernacle. Joseph is sometimes the ancient Hermes, Moses the younger. Nay Joseph is sometimes the fifth Mercury, mentioned in several traditions, who gave laws to the Egyptians, and taught them letters: and Moses was the fourth, whom they thought it criminal to name on account of the plagues they had endured at the famous exode. By these men, the light of philosophy was spread in Egypt. Daniel, Zorobabel and others of the captive Jews spread it in Chaldea: and Solomon had spread it, long before, among his neighbors the Phœnicians, who left some sparks of it in all the countries to which these famous navigators sailed.

This account of the rise and progress of philosophy, with a multitude of other circumstances, is so inconsistent and so un-

authorised, or rather so grossly fabulous, that they who give credit to it must first renounce all the conditions of historical probability. Josephus, Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria, and others, both Jews and Christians, laid the foundations of the whole legend, and dressed up different parts of it. Modern scholars, like Bochart, Huet, Stillingfleet, and many more, have taken a great deal of ridiculous pains to support it. I shall not enter at this time into any particulars concerning the proofs they bring. I will only say, that, by the same methods, it will not be difficult to make antiquity depose just as we please. If we affirm, as it is done in the present case, without even any seeming authority; if we connect at other times broken, and supply imperfect passages by guess; and if we paraphrase such as are obscure, till we make them say what there is no reason but the reason of our scheme to believe they were intended to say; in short, and to mention no more of these learned artifices, if we adopt such anecdotes as suit our purpose, and reject such as are not favorable to it, though derived from the same or equivalent authority, no historical paradox will want sufficient color to make it pass for truth, at least among those who have, as the writers above mentioned had, some favorite purpose to serve by it.

That arts and sciences travelled from the East to the West, from Chaldea to Egypt, and from Egypt to Greece, has been a received opinion:

"Tradidit Ægyptis Babylon, Ægyptus Achivis."

This opinion agrees so well with our Scripture account of the re-peopling the world after the deluge, and of the antiquity of nations, that it ought to be retained perhaps for that very reason. Two writers of more fame than good authority, but who are principally depended upon by modern antiquarians, seem to have thought so. Josephus relates, that Abraham was enriched by the immense presents the Egyptians made him for instructing them in the sciences that he brought from Chaldea. Eusebius assures us, from the same Josephus, that the Egyptians were ignorant of astrology and even of arithmetic, and from Eupolemus, that Abraham conversed, whilst he was in their country, with the priests of Heliopolis. But notwithstanding all the authorities on which this received opinion is founded, a man of ingenuity and much reading would not find it hard to establish another, by a new choice of passages, and by a new disposition of them; for the learned ring different changes on the same set of bells. He might show us perhaps, that arts and sciences came from the West in a more remote age than any the Greeks had knowledge of; that they were introduced and spread by the Atlantic people who overrun Africa and Europe, and of whom Solon had never

heard till the Egyptian priests related these wonders to him; or he might bring them perhaps from the kingdom of Uranus, that kingdom to which Atlas, coeval with Saturn, and his brother, according to Diodorus Siculus, gave his name; if in truth the people of that kingdom were different from the others who bore the same name, which point of criticism it might be more difficult than important to settle, since in all cases arts and sciences would still have been brought from the West to the East. After this, it would be easy to transport them from Ethiopia, the African Ethiopia, or Egypt, to more eastern nations, to the Phenicians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Indians and the Chinese.

SECTION II.

But to dwell no longer on these serious trifles, let us consider whether the rise and progress of philosophy, especially of the first, may not be accounted for with a probability that is founded on the general tenor of tradition, and on the analogy with what we know of nations that have grown up from barbarity to civility, and from ignorance to knowledge.

I think then, on both these foundations, that philosophy neither had, nor could have, in the ordinary course of things, a stated beginning at any point of time, nor in any particular place. It began, at different periods, in different places, and was subject to all the revolutions that attend the human state. It was the growth of some countries, it was propagated into others. It flourished long in some countries, it languished and was soon at an end in others. It thrived more or less, it lived and died according to the characters of people and the fortune of governments. Wherever it began, the beginnings of it were inconsiderable; for the trees which compose the grove of knowledge shoot up from the smallest seeds. Nor was this all. The imperfections of our nature, which have manifested themselves in the whole progress of philosophy, manifested themselves no doubt even more grossly at the rise of it, though ignorance concealed them at that time, as knowledge has disguised them since. Ignorance preceded knowledge. Error was coeval, and grew up with it. Error flourishes in shades, and before men could get out of those which ignorance spread, error had outgrown and overshadowed knowledge. Superstition accompanied them: and though error was the principal nurse, even knowledge contributed to rear this child of ignorance and fear.

It is agreeable to ancient traditions, and modern relations, to believe, that wild uncivilised people, though reduced into societies subject to some regulations of government, and directed by

some general rules which constant experience forces them to observe, have few means and little leisure to improve even in that knowledge, the foundations of which are already laid by urgent necessity among them, and which would render their state, if it was improved, much more comfortable. Their whole time is employed, the whole attention of their minds is bent to provide from day to day, and from season to season, for their sustenance: and the exercise of reason appears as little in them as in the beasts they sometimes hunt, and by whom they are sometimes hunted. Arts lie uninvented or unimproved, and science they have not. But the first openings to science, and the first motive to philosophical inquiries, they have even in the state I describe: and this motive shows itself in that curiosity to know the causes of the phenomena, which is so natural to the human mind. The most common excite it. Those that are extraordinary excite it more, and those from which they receive much benefit or much hurt excite it most of all. Another principle, as natural to the human mind, but not very apt to direct our inquiries right, is that whereby we make ourselves the measure, as well as the final cause of all things. It is this that has represented the unknown causes of the ordinary as well as extraordinary, of the beneficial as well as hurtful phenomena of nature to the minds of such savages and demi-savages as we describe, under the images of animal beings, a little different from man, but analogous to him, and endued only with greater power and greater intelligence. These they placed above or below, according to the different scenes of action to which imagination assigns them; like the captain above and the captain below, the two divinities of the Hottentots. Thus the heaven, the earth, the sea and the air were soon peopled with divinities that directed all their motions, and directed them all relatively to man. Unable to discover the order of second causes, to trace those that are remote from those that lie nearest to our observation, and those that are more general from those that are less so, which would have led them at last to the first efficient cause of all things, they took a shorter and easier method of accounting for appearances, by ascribing every one to some particular efficient cause. Thus they made gods as many as they wanted; and having once made them, it became equally unnecessary to look after intermediate, and impious to suppose any superior causes. It thundered: Jupiter was angry. It lightened: he darted one of his fiery bolts at some devoted head. What would curiosity desire more to know?*

* If ignorance and fear were the two first sources from which polytheism and idolatry arose, flattery was in process of time another; or that which was gratitude originally degenerated into flattery. Men who had been honored

I might illustrate what has been said by numerous examples, if I affected, what I esteem very little, particular and critical knowledge of the anecdotes of antiquity. It is enough for me to have read and considered them so far, as to see some general truths that result from them. I proceed therefore in the same manner to observe, that many ancient traditions might induce one to think, that the unity of God was the original belief of mankind, and that polytheism and idolatry were the corruptions

for the good they did during their lives,* or admired for their great actions, were adored after their deaths.† This custom was extended so far, that in some countries‡ not only public benefactors and heroes and kings were deified, but every man worshipped those to whom he had been particularly obliged.§ Thus it was that the Egyptians came to have whole dynasties of gods and of demi-gods.‖ The fame of Osiris, whenever he lived, had been great: and the veneration of his subjects for him was such, that they gave his name to their gods, or ascribed the names of their gods to him.¶ Some have imagined, and among them Sir J. Marsham, if I remember right, that his whole family and his whole court had their share of divine honors. That as his sister, who was his wife too, followed him to heaven under the name of Isis, so the president of his council became the god of arts and eloquence, under the name of Mercury: and the general of his troops was the patron of magnanimity and military virtue, under that of Hercules: nay that his brother and his sons were no more forgot by the priests, than Busiris and Antæus, the governors of two of his provinces, have been by the poets. Sesostris furnished the same matter to fables, many generations afterwards: and learned men think that several of those in Homer may be traced up to this famous expedition.— These deifications gave occasion to the hymns that were made and sung, not only as parts of divine worship, but as necessary means to preserve the memory of great events. Tully says somewhere, that the funeral orations in use at Rome had corrupted history; because historians, in the dearth of materials, had taken such as they found in those rhetorical panegyrics. How much more must such hymns have corrupted both history and religion? The simplicity of true theism could never subsist in the figures of poetry. Affected inspiration passed for real, hyperboles were understood literally, and the machinery of an ode was taken for matter of fact.

Men grew fonder of polytheism by another custom that prevailed. Every sect framed a new list of gods, or gave new names to ancient divinities: and although in some places temples were opened to the whole rabble of the sky, yet in others the gods seemed to be reduced to a smaller number, and every nation was fond to have it believed, that the deities they worshipped, belonged in a peculiar manner to their country and to them. The birth of Bacchus,

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

† Hic est vetustissimus referendi bene merentibus gratiam mos, ut tales numinibus ascribant. Plin. l. 2.

‡ Æthiopia. vid. Strab. l. 17.

§ Quamobrem major cœlitum populus etiam quam hominum intelligi potest, cum singuli quoquæ ex semetipsis totidem deos faciant, Junones, Geniosque adoptando sibi. Plin. ubi supra.

‖ Suscepit autem vita hominum consuetudoque communis, ut beneficiis excellentes viros in cœlum fama ac voluntate tollerent. Hinc Hercules hinc Castor et Pollux, &c. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

¶ Hæc arte Pollux, et vagus Hercules innixus arces attigit igneas. Hor.

of this orthodox faith. Cudworth seemed to me to have established this opinion on as good foundation as any opinions of this sort can rest, and I own that I once very much inclined to it. But when it is considered more closely, and without prepossession, I apprehend that it can be supported neither by sacred nor by profane authority.

Not by sacred; because the Mosaic account is plainly inconsistent with itself, as it stands in the books we have under the

for instance, had been claimed by several nations of Asia and Africa, when Orpheus applied to the son of Semele the fables he had learned in Egypt concerning another Bacchus, and instituted in honor of this new divinity, the orgia and religious ceremonies he had seen practised in honor of others more ancient, of the same name and profession, if I may use the term. It would be impossible to enumerate, not only all the different gods, but even all those that were worshipped under the same appellation; for Varro, I think, reckoned at least three hundred Jupiters.

But before I leave this head, I will mention very shortly, one or two ways more, by which these superstitions received increase, since they occur readily to my mind. Mistake and involuntary error was one, involuntary in the generality, though often imposed, sometimes helped, and always connived at, by the pious frauds of the priesthood. The legend of Dodona related, that two black doves took their flight from the Egyptian Thebes, one into Lybia, the other into Greece; that the first ordered the temple of Jupiter Hammon to be founded, and that the latter, perching on a tree at Dodona, and speaking in the human voice, declared it to be in the fates, that another oracle of Jupiter should be established there. The fact was attested by all that belonged to the temple, and the miracle passed currently. But the priests of the Theban Jupiter, who had no interest in this particular superstition, and with whom Herodotus conversed when he was in Egypt, explained the blunder and the fraud to him. Some Phœnician rovers, it seems, had carried off two priestesses, and sold one into Lybia, and the other into Greece, where they set up oracles on the model of that which was in their own country. Bochart has shown how affinity of sounds, which gave occasion to the Greek poets to call the priests Doves, might give occasion to this fable: and Sir J. Marsham cites a passage in Homer, where doves are said to carry ambrosia to Jupiter. Let me say, by the way, that Bochart might have learned from hence, how precarious a foundation for conjecture similitude of sound is, on which however, many of his conjectures rest principally.

That I may compare this ancient, with a modern, instance of impudent fraud and foolish credulity, let me mention among many, one that prevails at this time even in France. It is believed then in that country by devout persons, that some holy man had formerly a revelation in a vision or a dream, directing a monastery to be built, and founded in a particular field, which was shown to him. The good man published this revelation: a bigot age believed him: the monastery was founded, and a new order of lazy drones was added to the church. Their first and all their other monasteries were richly endowed: and they continue to this day under a name that marks their supposed divine institution, the name of Premontrè.

If such gross lies could be imposed, if plain matters of fact could be thus perverted to foment superstition, what errors must have arisen to have the same effect from the use of hieroglyphics, symbols, and allegories, wherein physical and moral philosophy were delivered down to posterity? If naked truth, passing through many hands, came to be disguised, what must have

name of Moses. Not by profane; because those anecdotes are quite unfavorable to this opinion, and because every probable reason that can be drawn from the constitution of human nature and from the ordinary process of the human mind, stands in direct contradiction to it.

Methusalem, it is said, saw both Adam and Noah, to both of whom God revealed himself in his unity. Shem, the son of Noah, lived even to the days of Abraham. Need I stay to show how impossible it is for any man in his senses to believe, that a tradition derived from God himself through so few generations, was lost among the greatest part of mankind, or that polytheism and idolatry were established on the ruins of it in the days of Serug, before those of Abraham, and so soon after the deluge? I should think it impossible even for the Jews themselves, who swallow so many fables and so many anachronisms. Since the unity of God was not universally taught in those early days, it was not so revealed, nor preserved in the manner assumed.

If the inconsistency of this account makes us reject it, we shall find less reason to believe, on the authority of profane traditions, that the unity of God was the primitive faith of mankind. Revelations to the Father and to the Restorer of the whole human race, might have established this faith universally: but without revelation it could not be that even of any one people, till observation and meditation, till a full and vigorous exercise of reason made it such. By considering the phenomena separately, men could not arrive at a knowledge of the one Su-

happened to truth, wearing a mask at her first appearance? The hieroglyphic and the symbol remained, and the fable continued in tradition, when the signification of the one, and the moral of the other, were forgotten. Books, which treat of ancient mythology, furnish many instances of this kind. I will mention two out of Diodorus Siculus, as examples of another way, whereby superstitious opinions and practices increased among the heathen. Pallas was a virgin, born out of the head of Jupiter. She was a goddess, famous in many respects; and we see of what consequence her statue was in the Trojan war.* Now the ancient naturalists meant to express, by this daughter of Jupiter, nothing more than the air, uncorrupted, and holding the sublimer place among the elements. Thus again, as the Romans carried the eagle, so the Egyptians carried the images of divers beasts in their ensigns.† These images, which were preserved only as monuments of their triumphs, came in time to be adored as authors of their victories. The dog, which Anubis, and the wolf, which Macedon, wore on their shields or on their helmets, after having been long honored as emblems of these demi-gods, came to be gods themselves. From some such originals, might proceed many other monstrous objects of adoration,

——————qualia demens
——Ægyptus portenta colit——.Juv.

* Diod. Sic. l. 1. † Ib. l. 2.

preme Being: and such men, as we speak of, were not capable of taking an entire view of the harmony of the whole.

Writers are apt to talk of general consent, as if it proved in all cases, that opinions so consented to, have a real conformity, and bear a real proportion, to the universal reason of mankind.—Thus in Tully, there are some attempts to prove the truth of polytheism. Thus a modern philosopher and divine* attempts to prove, that the belief of invisible spirits, employed in directing the affairs of this visible world, is founded in "natural instinct and the evidence of reason." It would be easy to show, in a multitude of instances, that if this postulatum be admitted, things manifestly false must pass often for true, and things demonstrated true, for false. Even the existence of a first intelligent cause, the very unity of God, of which we are speaking, must be owned to want this pretended criterion of truth. But if universal consent be not necessary to establish this demonstrated truth, how much less necessary is it, that this should have been the primitive belief of mankind? Polytheism and idolatry are repugnant to right reason, that is, to the conclusions that reason draws from sufficient information, and from the combinations and comparisons of real, not fantastic ideas and notions. But polytheism and idolatry have so close a connection with the few superficial and ill-verified ideas and notions of rude ignorant men, and with the affections of their minds, that one of them could not fail to be their first religious principle, nor the other their first religious practice.

There is so little profane authority for asserting the contrary, that if the passages, produced to prove it, were more direct, and more numerous and uniform than they are, they would not prove it to any one who gives as little credit to our very best systems of ancient chronology as they deserve. Suppose it clearly proved by some of these passages in any one instance, that the unity of God was the primitive belief, the term primitive will be equivocal, and the proof precarious. For how shall we be assured that we see clearly in the midst of chronological darkness, which is always thickest the further we go back, that this orthodox faith was not preceded among the same people by polytheism and idolatry, as we shall certainly find that it was succeeded by them? The whole world appears, as soon as we come into historical light, overrun with them. The vulgar embrace them easily, even after the true doctrine of a divine unity has been taught and received, as we may learn from the example of the Israelites: and superstitions grow apace and spread wide, even in those countries where Christianity has been established, and

* Thomassin. Met. d'etudier, &c., la philos.

is daily taught; as we may learn from the examples of the Roman churches, to say nothing of the reformed, who are less liable to the objection. But still it remains true, that the belief of one Supreme Being may be established on the ruins of polytheism and idolatry. In fact it hath been so, in historical ages. Why should it not have been so in that dark age, which preceded even the fabulous age, according to Varro's distribution of them? In the Theban dynasty, the Supreme Being was piously adored under the name of Kneph, and the people of it were so far from any idolatrous worship, that they refused on this account, as rigid Jews or Christians might have done, to contribute to a tax raised in Egypt, and applied to repair the temples, the images or pictures, and other instruments of idolatry. Now the Theban was the most ancient dynasty of Egypt: and the Egyptians were the most ancient people of the world: the first men therefore were unitarians, not polytheists. But how can this conclusion stand, when the premises neither have been, nor can be proved; when there may have been dynasties more ancient than this, or various revolutions of religion in this very dynasty; and when I have much more reason to believe, on the reason of the thing, and on a general analogy to what has happened in other countries, that the first men were polytheists, than any scholar has, on the precarious authority of a broken tradition or two, to pronounce them orthodox on this article of their faith? In short, there is, I think, no sufficient grounds on which to believe, that natural theology was taught in its purity first, and corrupted afterwards; whereas reason and observation both make it probable, that it has fared with the first philosophy as with every other part of science, that is, much error has been mingled sometimes with a little knowledge, and especially in the beginnings of men's inquiries into nature; and that at other times in the progress of these inquiries, where any progress has been made, more or less knowledge has been acquired with a less proportion of error. Conscious of human weakness and dependency, men have acknowledged in the infancy of philosophy, and even before the birth of it, power and intelligence superior to their own, such as made the world, or such at least as governs it. This was knowledge. But error grew up with it. They adored the visible objects that struck their senses, or at best the invisible beings that they assumed to reside in them. The rational, the orthodox belief, the first true principle of all theology, was not established, nor could be so, till the manhood of philosophy.

The progress of this manhood was everywhere slow, and in some countries none appears to have been ever made. On the contrary, men continued from age to age in the same state, which may be properly called a state of natural error and superstition.

Such nations, like changelings or naturals, may be said to have been children to their death. But in others this progress was made, and favorable combinations of circumstances helped to quicken it, in some more, in some less; but in all much more to the improvement of useful arts, and of other sciences, particularly of government, than to the investigation of truths concerning the first philosophy. We read, with a just admiration, the accounts that are come down to us, short and imperfect as they are, of the wisdom and policy of ancient nations, of the eastern empires, and particularly in Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, of the Egyptian government. All the arts and sciences were carried far among them, several much farther than we are able to imitate; and if we judge of their improvements in other sciences, as we may fairly do, by those which they made in astronomy, we shall find reason to be of opinion, that these sunk instead of rising in the hands of the Greeks, notwithstanding their boasts, and those of Plato particularly, that they improved all they learned; as we see that the knowledge of the true solar system was lost soon after the days of Pythagoras, and made way for the false one of Ptolemy. But when we consider the state of natural theology among the same nations, and at the same time, we admire no longer; we remain astonished, that men who excelled in every other branch of knowledge, should embrace so many absurd errors in this, and deduce from their philosophy a system of religion that rendered them a proverb, even among polytheists and idolaters. To give a full account of this, would be to give a history of the progress of the first philosophy. I shall touch the principal heads as shortly as I can; and indeed the greatest scholars when they pretend to do much more, to enter into a detail of particulars, and to treat this subject minutely, involve themselves and their readers in webs of hypotheses, one generally as improbable as another, and none of them of any real use. They show much learning, as it is called, and often much subtilty, and this is all they show that deserves any commendation, if even this deserves it. I refer you therefore to them, if you are desirous to see more particulars than you will find here, concerning the rise and early progress of Pagan theology and worship.

Among people immersed in ignorance and superstition, there arose in ancient days, as there have done since, some men of more genius than the common herd, and that were placed in situations and circumstances, which gave them perhaps opportunities of receiving instruction from others, or at least better means of observing nature themselves, and more leisure for the investigation of truth, and for the improvement of knowledge. These men were the first missionaries, and I suppose the best, that have

been seen in the world. They assembled little families, clans or hordes, into larger and more civilised communities: they invented many useful arts of life: they established order and good government, and they taught men the great lesson of promoting the happiness of individuals, by promoting that of the public, and of preserving liberty by subjection to law. These legislators, however, had been bred in the superstitious opinions and practices of their families and countries, and for that reason one may incline to think, that they preserved a tang of this superstition in their legislative capacity; since it is much more rare to see men shake off entirely long habits of error, than to see them rise out of mere ignorance to certain degrees of knowledge. On this supposition, it would be obvious to account for the superstitious opinions and practices which they propagated, and rendered venerable in all the governments they established. But a reflection presents itself immediately, which lets us into a secret, and perhaps a truer, motive that they had to hold this conduct. They might be neither bigots to old superstitions, nor to those that they superinduced themselves. They could not believe that they had a correspondence, which they knew they had not, with gods or demons, even if they believed the existence of such imaginary beings, and yet they all pretended to this great prerogative. The Egyptian wisdom, their religious and civil institutions, were taught by Mercury: and their first legislators and philosophers assumed the name, or had it given them on this account. Zoroaster and Zamolxis, one among the Bactrians, and the other among the Scythians, had revelations from Vesta. Minos had them from Jupiter himself, and Charondas from Saturn. Numa conversed familiarly with Ægeria, and Pythagoras with Minerva. I need mention no more, for I will not offend by adding Moses to this catalogue.

Now since these men imposed revelations they knew to be false, we may conclude, they were not much in earnest about several of the doctrines they taught, and of the institutions they made, not even about a doctrine which most, and I believe, all of them, were extremely solicitous to inculcate, I mean the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. They endeavored to profit of the general disposition, to apprehend superior powers, in some of whom superstition had accustomed men to imagine a severity of justice, and even an inclination to afflict and torment; and they knew enough of the human heart, to know that men would be flattered with immortality in any shape, and though the consequence of it might be their own damnation. Religion in the hands of these philosophical legislators, who succeeded to the authority of fathers of families, was a proper expedient to enforce obedience to political regimen: and neither the

doctrines of it, nor the rites and ceremonies and manners of worship, could be too gross for those who had believed and practised many other superstitions in the days of still greater simplicity and ignorance, and whilst they were under paternal government. I can easily persuade myself, for I think it not only possible but probable, that many of the reformers had discovered the existence of one Supreme Being, which cannot long escape the knowledge of those who observe the whole face of nature. But this knowledge, and the consequences they should be able to deduce from it, might not seem to them sufficiently adapted to the character of the people with whom they had to do: a people led by their senses, and by the first appearances of things, with little use of reason, and little exercise of reflection, which might have rendered them capable of rising from sensible to intelligible objects.

Natural theology, pure and unmixed, it might be thought, would speak in vain to a multitude, in whom appetites and prepossessions, affections and passions, raised by sensible objects, were strong, and the force of reason small. It was necessary, therefore, in the opinion of these missionaries of good policy and good manners, and, in order to promote them both, of religion likewise, to suit their doctrines to such gross conceptions, and to raise such affections and passions by human images, and by objects that made strong impressions on sense, as might be opposed with success to such as were raised by human images, and by sensible objects too, and were destructive of order, and pernicious to society. That true self-love and social are the same, as you have expressed a maxim, I have always thought most undeniably evident; or that the author of nature has so constituted the human system, that they coincide in it, may be easily demonstrated to any one who is able to compare a very few clear and determinate ideas. But it will not follow, that he to whom this demonstration is made, nor even he who makes it, shall regulate his conduct according to it, nor reduce to practice what is true in speculation. We are so made, that a less immediate good will determine the generality of mankind, in opposition to one that is much greater, even according to our own measure of things, but more remote, and an agreeable momentary sensation will be preferred to any lasting and real advantage which reason alone can hold out to us, and reflection alone can make us perceive. Philosophy may teach us to do voluntarily, as I have read that Aristotle says it does, what others are constrained to do by force. But the many were not philosophers: and, therefore, the few might think very plausibly, that fear was necessary to make them act as such. The influence of reason is slow and calm, that of the passions sudden and violent. Reason therefore

might suggest the art that served to turn the passions on her side.

Though I think, that they who instituted religions in the Pagan world were not convinced of the truth of their own doctrines, and that their sole view was to add, by this political expedient, divine to human authority, and the sanction of revelation to the dictates of right reason, yet I am persuaded, that many of them believed the existence of one Supreme Being, the fountain of all existence, as I said just now. They believed farther, the anecdotes of antiquity make it plain that they did, the existence of many inferior beings generated, not ungenerated gods and demons. They erected, as it were, a divine monarchy on the ruins of a divine aristocracy; and in this respect, as well as in many others, they refined, whilst they improved in knowledge, out of the absurdities of original superstition, into one that was a little less absurd, and that came nearer truth, or disguised error under more plausible appearances. But all these refinements, at least as soon as the distinction of a public and a secret doctrine was made, whenever that was made, became parts of their hidden doctrine, which was communicated to the initiated alone. Their outward doctrine differed not from that of the vulgar, it was the same: or rather the superstition they found established by custom and habit, and that which they superinduced by institution, composed one monstrous system of ridiculous polytheism and nauseous idolatry. I imagine, that the first philosophy, of which I am to speak principally in this essay, took its rise among the sons of men, and was sometimes purged and improved, as every other part of philosophy was in certain places, and rendered more abominable in others.

I do not intend to make the apology of those who destroyed the true principles of natural theology, by adopting old, and inventing new superstitions, in order to enforce submission to government, and the practice of morality. I say only, the first reformers of mankind are not without excuse on this head. Great authorities may be cited, ancient and modern, Pagan and Christian; some for imposing things untrue, some for concealing things true, and some for doing both, in matters of religion. But a much better excuse, and such a one as divines particularly will have no good grace in rejecting, may be urged in their favor; and if nothing can justify, this will at least alleviate, their guilt.

This was their case: they found mankind immersed in superstition, and accustomed to licentiousness. To cure them of the latter, they made their profit of the former. They reduced curious superstitions that were taken up by chance, as every man's imagination suggested them to him, and without design, into systems; and they directed these systems in doctrine and practice, to

the purpose of reforming the manners of the half-savage people whom they civilised, and to the improvement of social life under the influence of law. Appeals to the reason of unreasonable men would have had little effect: and they had no power to force inward conviction, any more than outward profession. They employed therefore the only expedient, as bad a one as it was, that they had, sufficient to force both; the dread of superior power, maintained and cultivated by superstition, and applied by policy.

What now was the case of the famous legislator Moses?—Some excuse for the former will result, I think, from this comparison. When God remembered his covenant with Abraham, an absurd expression, but very theological, the descendants of Abraham had forgot their God. They were become Egyptians, that is, they were attached to the country, and still more attached to all the superstitions of it. They were constrained by miracles to abandon one; but no miracles, no interpositions of providence could oblige them to abandon the other. God was forced, therefore, to indulge them in several superstitious prejudices, as learned divines scruple not to affirm; and in fact it appears, that a great part of the ritual observances and laws of the Egyptians and of the Israelites were the same, or so near alike, as to leave no doubt of their having one common origin. This even Herman Witzius cannot deny. He allows that there was a great and wonderful conformity between them, "magnam atque mirandam convenientiam in religionis negotio:" and therefore he would persuade, if he could, against the plainest evidence that antiquity can furnish on any subject, that the Egyptians borrowed these institutions from the Israelites, the masters from their scholars and their slaves; which would not mend the matter neither extremely, if it could be shown, as he attempted very weakly to show it, against Marsham and Spencer.

But you will ask, and a reasonable question it will be, why was God forced to indulge his people in these superstitions? The divine has his answer ready; because it becomes Infinite Wisdom to do nothing by extraordinary and supernatural means, which may be done by ordinary and natural; and because wise governors compound, as it were, often with obstinacy, and indulge men in some prejudices, that they may draw them off the more effectually from others.* For these weighty reasons,

* Thus it is divines account for the many Egyptian rites that were preserved in the Mosaical institution, by assuming that God ordered it so out of indulgence to his chosen people, who were strongly attached to the religion and manners of Egypt, and in order to reconcile them to his law, by a little mixture of superstition in the ceremonious part of it. Let another assumption, made on the same principle, and more presumptuous, if that be possible, than the former, be mentioned. It is this. That sincere, pious and

the God of truth chose to indulge error, and suited his institutions to the taste of the age, "ad sæculi gustum et usum," says Spencer. For these weighty reasons he would not enlighten

learned man Mr. Whiston supposes, in his new theory of the earth, that the sun, moon and stars were made before the six days work of the creation began; though they are said to have been made at the same time, according to the obvious sense of the word of Moses. They are said then first to be, or to be made, only because they became first conspicuous then, and their bodies distinctly visible, as in a clear day or night they now appear to us, according to Mr. Whiston. The point is delicate, and therefore the good man thought himself obliged to account, as well as he could, for this apparent, and I fear real, difference between Moses and him. He says, in the first place, that Moses wrote in this manner, because it was necessary to secure the Jews from the adoration of the host of heaven. There was no other way to apply a fitting remedy to that prevailing custom. The worship of terrestrial things was demonstrated, by this account of their original, to be foolish and absurd; but that of the celestial bodies would have seemed permitted at least, if they too had not been included in the same relation. He says, in the next place, that we ought to look on the Mosaic history of the creation, as on a journal of the appearances of things, such an one as an honest and observing spectator on the earth would have made and have believed true, though it was not agreeable to the reality of things. Now to the first of these bold assumptions, there lies a most cruel objection, of which Mr. Whiston takes no notice. If Moses had told the Jews, that the celestial bodies were created beings, as well as our earth, though created before, even long before it, they would have believed him as soon, and have been as effectually armed against idolatrous worship, by a true representation, as they believed him, and were thus armed by an untrue one. Another objection indeed Mr. Whiston supposes might be made to him, and he answers it plausibly enough; for though there might be no spectator to observe and record what passed, yet if the nature of the history required it, Moses might very properly represent things as they would have appeared to any such spectator who had been present. But Mr. Whiston immediately destroys the force, such as it is, of his own answer. "To speak my mind freely," says he, "I believe that the Messias was there actually present, that he made the journal, that he delivered it after to Moses on Mount Sinai, and from thence it appears in the front of his Pentateuch at this day." It is no longer Moses then who represents things untruly, but such as they would have appeared to an honest ignorant spectator. It is the Messias who represents them untruly to Moses, and deceives others deliberately, for he could not be deceived himself, to prevent by this fallacy an evil, that would have been prevented just as well by the truth. Whatever rank Mr. Whiston is pleased to allow the Messias, he should have respected this divine person enough, not to impute to him a false journal, made for an unnecessary purpose. But this he does: whilst other divines impute to the Supreme Being, an indulgence to the superstitious prejudices and habits of the Israelites, though reason as well as experience shows, that these means, which they assume that Infinite Wisdom employed, were in no sort proportionable to the end which they assume that the same wisdom proposed. These are the profane effects of theological presumption. I would sooner be reputed, nay I would sooner be, a Pagan than a Christian, or an atheist than a theist; if to be one or the other it was necessary to believe such absurdities as these, which, however disguised, and softened by a certain cant of expression, are directly profane, and indirectly, or by consequence at least, blasphemous.

the understanding, soften the hearts, nor determine the wills of his chosen people; though he had hardened the heart of Pharaoh a little before against the strongest manifestations of almighty power; which is, I presume, as extraordinary and supernatural an operation as that of softening the heart to yield to such manifestations. We may carry this farther. God contented himself, according to these bold judges of the principles and views of his proceedings, to take ordinary and natural means in a case to which they were not adequate, as he must have known in his prescience that they would not be, and as we know by the history of these people, that they were not; their whole history being a continued series of difficult conversions from idolatry, and easy relapses to it. By this comparison it appears then already that Moses, who pretended to be directed and authorised by God himself, indulged the Israelites in many favorite superstitions: as profane legislators indulged the people, with whom they had to do.

But since I am got thus far into this subject, allow me to take a step or two more, and to raise from the dead one of those ancient sages, who gave laws to heathen nations, and instituted religions among them. Let me suppose, that one of our learned divines summed up the accusation against him and his brethren, and contradistinguished them from the legislator of the Hebrew people, thus. Notwithstanding the conformity between some ritual laws and observances of this people, and of the Egyptians, and the frequent apostacies of the former, the knowledge of the one true God was preserved among them by the Mosaic dispensation, whilst polytheism and idolatry overspread the rest of the world. Thus the great design of God was effected; and thus the whole economy of divne providence is justified. Would the ancient sage be left without any reply? I think not.

He might insist in his own excuse, that Moses, like profane lawgivers,* did not only indulge the people in some favorite habitual superstitions, but in others of his own institution; and that his predilection for all these, over the real duties of natural religion, made him inflict more severe penalties on those who violated the former, than on those who violated the latter. He might insist, that among the superstitions of Mosaic institution there was one, which could be charged neither on the Egyptian, nor any other heathen nation, and which surpassed the most extravagant of theirs. Besides the gods, which may be said to

* Proclive est observare, Deum cuilibet legi rituali, manu elata, hoc est protervè et ex præmeditato violatæ, supplicium extremum statuisse; quum tamen peccatis suâ naturâ gravioribus, fornicationi, furto, proximi mutilationi, et ejusmodi, pœnas longe mitiores irrogavit.—Spen. l. 1, c. 1.

have been, as it were, in common, a local tutelary divinity was assumed by every city or nation, and was distinguished and appropriated by a particular appellation. This superstition, he would assert, that Moses imitated, and abused, and aggravated by his imitation. Though polytheism and idolatry overspread the world, might he say, the existence of the Monad, or the unity of the one Supreme Being, was not unknown to many of us. We could not teach this doctrine with success to the vulgar, uncapable of conceiving things purely intellectual, but we taught it to those who were initiated into our mysteries: and if we did not propose the true God as an object of public and popular adoration, neither did we bring the notions of him down to the low and gross conceptions of the multitude, nor expose the majesty of this awful Being to their profanations. This Moses did. He would not consent to take upon him the commission he was appointed to execute, nor go to the children of Israel, till he was able to tell them the name of the God who sent him. In compliance with his importunity, and with the prejudices of the people, to whom he was sent, God is said to have given himself a name, a very magnificent one indeed, and such an one as might denote the Supreme being; but still a name, by which he was to be distinguished as the tutelary God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of one family first, and then of one nation particularly, and almost exclusively of all others.

Our ancient sage might add, that the least part of the miracles wrought among the Israelites, with so much profusion, and in a continued series of divine interpositions, would have been more than sufficient to draw any other nation, nay all the nations of the earth, from polytheism and idolatry. That in this case, neither he nor any other legislator would have found it difficult, by propagating the belief and worship of the true God, to civilise savage people without having recourse to the expedient they employed. That as they were in a case very different, they deserve excuse and pity rather than blame, for promoting natural religion and good government at the expense of true theology. But that Moses deserves neither excuse nor pity, since he chose to make use of superstitions which he did not want, nay which defeated, instead of securing, his intent; if his intent was to destroy idolatry by the means of them: for the sage would insist, with great appearance of reason, first, that the true God was made known to the Israelites by such manifestations of himself to them, and that his law was promulgated in so solemn and awful a manner, if there is any truth in the Jewish traditions, as to leave no pretence for adding any thing to confirm the knowledge or to enforce the law. He would insist in the next place, that if the apostacies of the Israelites, after such manifestations and declarations of the

one true God, can be any way accounted for, it must be by the effect of the very expedient which our divines pretend, that infinite wisdom employed to prevent these apostacies. He would conclude in short, that Moses and the heathen legislators employed the same means, with this difference, that these means were better proportioned to their end than to his; since they designed to govern mankind by superstition; and he meant, or as divines presume to tell us, God meant, to destroy idolatry by indulgence to the very superstitions out of which it grew. Upon the whole matter, whether the first sages are entirely excusable or not, their proceeding was much more reasonable than that which was followed by the order, and under the immediate direction of God himself, as these Eunomians, who affect to understand the whole secret of the divine economy, and to know God as well as he knows himself, have the boldness to assert.

Though I have said thus much, in excuse for those who were the first to establish religion and government, I shall not attempt any excuse for those who succeeded them, and who cultivated error and superstition on a principle of private ambition. This might be the case sometimes, and to some degree among the most savage people in ancient days, as we see that it is in our own age among the wild nations of America and Africa, who have their conjurers and their diviners, and who practice certain foolish rites under their direction. It was more so, no doubt, when little states began to be formed by assemblages of a few roving families, that fixed themselves in societies under the conduct of some leader of their own or of some foreign legislator; the memory of which events has been preserved in the fabulous traditions that are come down to us concerning Orpheus and others; for a certain concurrence of fabulous traditions may hold out with sufficient evidence some general truths. But we have, if I mistake not, in the story of Pythagoras, an example of error and superstition, propagated on a motive of private ambition, that is more circumstantial and better vouched.

Pythagoras came into Italy, with great advantages for effecting his purposes. He came among Greeks, divided into many little states, under very unsettled governments. He came with great reputation of learning and wisdom and sanctity, from a nation renowned for its antiquity, for civil policy and for divine mystery; from a nation from whom the first rudiments of civility and even the use of letters had been imported into Greece, the mother country of all these little states. He had a figure, for even that has been thought worthy of mention, to inspire respect to those who were to be taken by the eye. He had eloquence, to lead those who were to be led by the ear: and his miracles, for miracles are easily imposed on people ignorant or

superstitious, and the people Pythagoras had to do with were both, made him easily pass for the Pythian or Hyperborean Apollo, for one of the genii that were supposed to inhabit the moon, or for a celestial divinity.

He opened his school and began his mission at Crotona, where his orations to the old men, to the young men, to the women and to the children, and much more to the miracle of fish which Jamblicus relates so circumstantially, gained him admittance and established his credit. As his first school or college, so his first church, was founded here. I may call it by that name, after Clement of Alexandria, and may observe, after that father likewise, a conformity between the Pythagorean and Christian institutions in this respect. Persons of all ages and sexes, who were converted by the miracles and sermons of Pythagoras, resorted to this church. They were instructed in the public doctrines of his religion, and in those divine truths, which they were to believe first in hopes of understanding them afterwards; which is the very method that St. Austin in some part of his works prescribes to Christian converts. Some few, and such alone as he judged proper after a long and severe probation, like that he had gone through himself in Egypt, and from which neither the recommendations of Polycrates, nor the favor of Amasis could exempt him, were admitted into his college, that became a seminary of enthusiasts. They lived there like Cenobites, members of this spiritual family, renouncing their own, and throwing their whole substance into the common stock. Their long silence, their abstinence, their self-denial, their purifications, their austerities, and the torments to which they submitted, prepared them for any trials, to which they could be possibly exposed in the propagation of their master's spiritual empire.

In such an age, and with such ministers as these, men devoted to him, and ready to be martyrs for him, he could not have failed to succeed among a people who were already prepared, by the errors and superstitions of their former institutions, for any that the scheme of his ambition could render it necessary to impose. But he and his disciples showed this scheme too grossly and too soon: for notwithstanding all the fine things that are said of this famous person by Porphyry, Jamblicus, and othet writers, and notwithstanding all the obscurity and imperfection of traditions concerning these Grecian colonies, it seems apparent enough that the accusations of Cylo and Nino were not void of truth, nor the jealousy that prevailed groundless. Pythagoras caused revolutions in several cities, in Crotona, in Sybaris, in Catana for instance; and his disciples, such as Zaleucus and Charondas, if in truth they were his disciples, assumed,

wherever they came, the part of legislators, whether called to it or not; as if it had been a right belonging to this religious society to give laws not only to their own, but to the civil society that admitted them likewise. Such too we may believe they pretended it was, since they all pretended to be divinely inspired: and divine inspiration, as well as divine institution, implies an authority far superior to any that is merely human. Diogenes Laertius hints that the Crotonians killed him for fear of being reduced under tyranny by him: and some traditions say, that commanding the army of the Agrigentines against the Syracusians he was beat, and killed in the pursuit.

In all cases, the declaration he was reported to have made, that he had rather be a bull for one day than an ox always, was understood; and the bull perished. Almost all his disciples perished with him: and the expulsion of this sect out of Italy, may be properly enough compared to that of Christianity out of Japan. The effect was not so entire in the former as in the latter instance; since the philosophy of Pythagoras continued to be taught in Italy by Aristæus and others, who took warning and affected government no longer; but who thought too, or pretended to think, that the gods would be displeased if they suffered so divine an institution to be extinguished.

The same spirit, and the same apprehension did not prevail in Egypt and the great eastern kingdoms: for which reason I persuade myself that their ecclesiastical and civil constitutions grew up together, and that people who submitted to kingly, might submit the more easily to priestly government; because the priests who had used to lead them by superstition, had acted in concert with their kings to make these establishments. Kings wanted their influence over the people; the people wanted their influence over kings: and kings and people were both silly enough to imagine that they wanted such a protection from the gods, and such an intercourse with heaven as these prophets and seers, and magicians and priests, for we may jumble them all together, could alone procure.

SECTION. III.*

As beneficial as these men had been whilst they stood distinguished by knowledge and wisdom, or by pretensions to

* I have sometimes thought, and said perhaps in our conversations, that the life of mankind may be compared aptly enough to that of every individual, in respect to the acquisition of science. There is in both a state of infancy, of adolescence, of manhood, and of dotage to be observed. The

them, not by rank, as individuals not as members of a particular order, they became hurtful in many respects when they composed a community within a community, had a separate interest, and by consequence a separate policy. I pretend not to consider how their power encroached on that of the state, and became independent on it, nor how their wealth increased to the impoverishment of all other orders. We may guess at the ancient by what we know of the modern clergy, and may be allowed to wonder that in those days, as well as in our own, it has been found so hard to discover that, though civil government cannot subsist so well without religion, religion may subsist and flourish too without ecclesiastical government. It will be enough for my purpose to observe, to what a degree of wealth and power this order arose in the nations we speak of, and to show how it propagated error in philosophy, and superstition in religion.

As to the first, then, the reverend Magi in Persia had the province of teaching princes how to govern, and of assisting their pupils in government afterwards. It was much the same in Egypt, where the priests had a peculiar right to admonish and to reprove, indirectly at least, the kings. In Ethiopia, this pre-

ideas of infancy are taken superficially from the first appearances of things to the senses. They are ill compared, ill associated, and compounded into notions for the most part either trifling or absurd. In adolescence, ideas increase and grow a little better determined. Experience and observation compare and compound them better. In manhood, the judgment is ripened, the understanding formed, the errors of former states are assumed to be corrected, and the farther progress of science to be more sure. Thus it should be, no doubt. But affections and passions multiply, and gather strength, in the whole course of this progress. What is gained one way is lost another: and if real knowledge increases, real error mixes and increases with it. Fancy may not impose, as it did perhaps, but it may incline strongly to error: and authority and custom will do the rest. They will invert the whole order of science. Ignorant ages and ignorant nations will impose on the most knowing: and even in the same age and nation, infancy imposes on adolescence, and adolescence on manhood, till the great round is finished, and the philosopher who began a child ends a child.

Let this be applied principally to knowledge in the first philosophy. Arts of all kinds, and many other sciences, have been improved not so much by building on old, as by laying new foundations, not so much by assuming implicitly principles either ancient or modern, as by examining all, and adopting, or rejecting, or inventing without any regard to authority. The very reverse of this proceeding has been practised in matters of the first philosophy: and the professors of it at this hour, in the mature age of philosophy, do little more very often than repeat the babblings of its infancy, and the sallies of its youth. These men are more properly ancient philosophers than those whom they call so. They live indeed in the mature age of philosophy. But in this age, whenever metaphysics and theology are concerned, they seem to rush forward into a state of dotage, and affect to hold the language that the first philosophy held in Oriental, Egyptian, and Grecian schools, before she had learned to speak plain.

rogative was carried farther: for there the kings were ordered to die whenever the priests thought fit, till a sacrilegious king, Ergamenes, I think, arose, broke into the sacred college, and put these ghostly tyrants themselves to death. This did not happen neither till the bloody inquisition had been long in possession of this power, if Ergamenes lived about the time of the second Ptolemy. The wealth and the immunities of this order were as exorbitant as the authority and power. We may learn from Diodorus the Sicilian, not only that this order had raised itself to a partnership in the sovereignty, but to an exemption from all impositions and burdens; for the members of it were "participes imperii—cunctis oneribus immunes," and they had also one third of the whole property of Egypt. As to their immunities, there is an astonishing instance in the book of Genesis. The miserable people were obliged in a great famine to sell their lands to the king for bread. But the king gave bread to the priests: they eat their fill, and kept their lands.

To speak now of the manner in which, and the reasons for which, this order of men propagated error in philosophy, and superstition in religion, let it be considered, how necessary it was for them to maintain that reputation of sanctity, knowledge, and wisdom, on which this esteem and reverence had been founded. They had provided themselves many supports, in the form and constitution of the Egyptian and other governments; but they saw at the same time, like able men, how necessary it was to continue in force and vigor, the original principles of the empire they had over the minds of men, on which all the rest depended. The general scheme of their policy therefore seems to have been this. They built their whole system of philosophy on the superstitious opinions and practices that had prevailed in days of the greatest ignorance: and, by consequence, their principal object was false, not real science. Real science would have discovered their fallacies in a multitude of instances: and it would have served their chief purpose effectually in none, if they had left it unsophisticated. Besides, men began to rise, as Tully expresses himself, "à necessariis ad elegantiora." They might therefore have been overtaken by some who were not of their order in real, or have been detected in fantastical science. It was fit, therefore, that they should guard against both these accidents: and they did so with much cunning. They multiplied and exaggerated their pretensions to such kinds of knowledge, as every man was conscious to himself that he could not acquire; and yet as every man was prepared to believe, according to the prejudices of the age, that they had acquired by traditions, derived from ancient sages, or even by divine illuminations, and a correspondence several ways carried on with gods and demons.

But still they did not rest their security even on this alone. They had other expedients, and they employed them artfully and successfully. Most of their doctrines were wrapped up in the mysterious veil of allegory. Most of them were propagated in the mysterious cypher of sacred dialects, of sacerdotal letters, and of hieroglyphical characters: and the useful distinction of an outward and inward doctrine was invented, one for the vulgar, and one for the initiated; that is, one for those to whom it was useless, or dangerous to trust their secret, and one for those the ability, credulity, or enthusiasm of whom they had sufficiently tried by a long noviciate. Among the first, allegory passed for a literal relation of facts, and hyperbole was the common style. Among the last, all was fraud or folly. We see enough of the first in the Old Testament to make both probable. Much in this manner, I think that the corruption of the first philosophy was established in Egypt and the east, from whence it spread to distant countries and distant ages, after it became a trade in the hands of men, in whom the characters of philosophers and priests were confounded.

It would be tedious and useless to descend into many particulars concerning the various systems of polytheism and idolatry. Let us content ourselves with making some few observations that may point out the propagation of error in natural theology, as it descended from the Egyptians and other nations to the Greeks. To be particular about the rise of it would be ridiculous affectation. It arose long before the men, who appear to us to have been the first teachers of it, existed. Pherecydes of Syros, who wrote in prose, and philosophised out of verse and song the first among the Greeks, was the master of Pythagoras and Thales, who founded the Italic and Ionic sects, and lived therefore later than the fiftieth Olympiad. Homer and Hesiod lived indeed before the institution of the Olympiads, and perhaps much about the same time; though Tully or Cato,* places your blind man long before the other.

But I am far from thinking, that Homer meant his Iliad and Odyssey should pass for philosophical poems; though it has been the madness of pedants almost from his own age to ours, to extol him and censure him as a philosopher. He meant to flatter his countrymen, by recording the feats of their ancestors, the valor of some, and the prudence of others; and he employed for the machinery of his poem the theology of his age, as Tasso and Milton have employed that of theirs. Had Arnobius, and much more such a weak philosopher as Justin, or such a warm rhetor as Tertullian, lived in our days, you would have been attacked in

* Cic. de Senect.

your turn, and have been made the father of rosycrusianism, and of all the silly doctrines about sylphs and gnomes; just as reasonably as Homer has been attacked, by the zeal of Christian writers, for teaching polytheism and idolatry. I believe too, that you would have been as well defended by your commentator, by his interpretations of your allegories, and by his explanations of the hidden sense of the Rape of the Lock, for instance, as Homer was by those who found out an hidden sense in all his fables, and who judged that he must have been very knowing in natural philosophy, because he mentions sun, wind, rain, and thunder, for which you laugh at Politian and others of his learned admirers.*

They who have represented Homer as a great philosopher, have made themselves ridiculous. They who have represented him as the great author of polytheism, idolatry, and superstition, have done him wrong. Many ancient bards flourished long before him. Who they were, whether the name of Orpheus for instance, was given to different persons, like that of Pharo, and that of Zoroaster very probably: whether it was derived from a Phœnician or Arabian word that signified knowledge, as Vossius thought; whether no such man as Orpheus ever existed, as Aristotle thought; or whether the verses ascribed to him were written by a certain Cecrops,† as the Pythagoricians pretended, it matters little. We may reason in this case much as Tully does about Atlas, Prometheus, and Cepheus;‡ and we may conclude that the fabulous anecdotes, with which old traditions were crowded about Orpheus, to mention the most famous only, and the doctrines he taught, and the mysteries he instituted, prove at least thus much, that Egyptian theology, and many of those superstitions had been imported into Greece long before Homer lived. We may easily figure to ourselves, with what advantage this theology and these superstitions were introduced among the rude, illiterate, and at that time half-savage Greeks, from a nation as famous as the Egyptian, and by men, whether Egyptians, Phœnicians, or Greeks, who had been the scholars of priests, prophets, seers, and magicians; of holy men who saw visions, and dreamed dreams, and enjoyed every sort of divine communication in a country, where dynasties of gods had ruled so long. Plato had the front, in a much more enlightened state of Greece, to publish his own whimsies or those of Pythagoras, in his Timæus, on the faith of men begotten by gods, and therefore well acquainted with their fathers. Might not these missionary poets, or their masters, pass for such sons of the gods in

* Pref. to the Iliad.
† De Nat. Deor. l. 1.
‡ Tuscul. Quæs. l. 5.

the dark ages we refer to? Or might not that divine fury, the sure mark of inspiration, be ascribed to them, which was believed to seize the Sibyls, and which seized the prophets and the sons of the prophets among the Jews, nay even those who happened to fall in their way, as we learn from the Bible, that it seized not only Saul, but even the men he had sent to take David.

We may believe that Homer's predecessors went about singing their spiritual and moral canticles, philosophical rhapsodies, and heroical ballads, as tradition reports that he did after them. What became of their hymns or canticles we know not, whether any were preserved, or when they were lost. But lost they were, which the scattered fragments of his works had been likewise, if they had not fallen by accident into the hands of Lycurgus, as Plutarch, whom you cite for this fact, relates; and if Solon had not perfected the compilation of them, as Diogenes Laertius relates, whom I wish you had cited likewise, to show that the two greatest legislators of Greece published the two first editions of Homer. In this manner his writings became the sole repertory to later ages of all the theology, philosophy, and history of those which preceded his. All the scribblers of Greece imitated, and pillaged them, and none more than Plato.

Solon had studied philosophy in Egypt under the two most celebrated priests of Heliopolis and Sais, and had learned even the Atlantic language, according to the report of Plato. This consideration might influence the legislator strongly, in favor of a poet who had been skilled in the political, mythological, and and every other part of Egyptian knowledge, above three centuries before he went to that school for instruction. But the general reputation of Egyptian wisdom, the beauty of those poems wherein they found, or imagined that they found so much of it interspersed, and the loss perhaps of what their first poetical reformers had committed to writing, if they wrote any thing, might raise the esteem for Homer among all the Greek philosophers, to that exorbitant and even ridiculous height, to which in fact it rose. As soon as the rage of making complete systems of philosophy, wherein theology and legislative knowledge had always a principal share, began to be the prevailing mode in Greece, every system-maker thought it necessary to be armed with the authority of Homer: and they did for this purpose, the same thing by his writings, that St. Jerom says somewhere or other was done by the sacred writings, every one endeavored to drag them to his sense, even when they were contrary to it. "Scripturas trahere repugnantes."

The poems of Homer, and the whole Pagan theology, like embroidered or painted curtains, coarsely wrought by superstí-

tion first, and afterwards enriched and heightened in their coloring by the imaginations of poets, hid the true scene wherein the principles of natural theology are to be found from vulgar sight, which they amused with gaudy and grotesque figures, out of the proportions and forms of nature, divine or human, instead of showing this scene in that simplicity, in which it will appear to every sober eye. The true scene wherein the principles of natural theology are to be found, was signified perhaps in that remarkable inscription on a temple at Sais, which Plutarch mentions, however differently that may have been interpreted. "I am all that has has been, is, and shall be, and my veil no mortal has ever yet removed." This veil represented the works of God, in which and by which alone he is to be discovered, as far as he has thought fit to communicate any knowledge of himself. Beyond this veil the eye of human reason can discover nothing.— By the help of these images, we may form a just and clear notion of the different ways by which men run into error, on this important subject: the generality, by neglecting to contemplate God in the works of God: philosophers, by attempting to remove the veil, to contemplate God in his nature and essence, not in his works alone. The vulgar personified, deified, and worshipped the works, without looking up to the worker, as their poets had taught them: the generation of the visible world was to them a generation of invisible gods, for they had taken ideas of power and wisdom, of good and evil, from the phenomena; and they personified and deified not only these, but affections, passions, and almost every complex mode that the human mind can frame. When they were in this profuse mood of deification, we cannot wonder if they deified those men from whom they had received great benefits, nor if tutelary heroes became tutelary gods. Some of the philosophers, having been led by a more full and accurate contemplation of nature, to the knowledge of a Supreme self-existent Being, of infinite power and wisdom, and the first cause of all things, were not contented with this degree of knowledge.— They would explain, they would even analyse the divine nature. They made a system of God's moral as well as physical attributes, by which to account for the proceedings of his providence; and reasoning thus beyond all their ideas, by a certain agitation and ferment of the mind, they remained in the labyrinths of absurdity they had formed; acknowledging the existence of this Monad, this Unity, elevated above all essence and all intelligence and yet neglecting to worship him; conforming to the practice of idolatry, though not to the doctrines of polytheism.

But how true soever all this may be, and much more to the same effect that might be added, yet the great principle that maintained all the corruptions of natural religion, was that of

priestcraft. Philosophers and priests were the same persons long, as I imagine that bards and philosophers had been before: and when they assumed their distinct characters, the priests were too powerful, and the people too bigotted, to hope for any reformation. An opposition to the grossest superstition, or a disbelief of that rabble of the sky, those gods of different ranks and different employments, those celestial husbands and wives, fathers and children, brothers and sisters, would have passed for atheism; and the best of men would have been reputed atheists, and have been treated accordingly, as Socrates was. It was in these countries then, as it is in several countries now. Nothing was too absurd for stupid credulity to receive, nor for artifice, emboldened by success, to impose. Sham miracles were shown like other false wares, in a proper light, and at a proper distance; and those errors which had contracted the rust of antiquity became, for that reason alone, venerable. In short, the whole scheme of religion was applied then, as it is in many countries, Christian and others, still, to the advantage of those who had the conduct of it. The worship of one God, and the simplicity of natural religion, would not serve their turn. Gods were multiplied, that devotions and all the profitable rites and ceremonies which belong to them, might be so too. The invisible Mithras would have been of little value, without the visible, to the magi: and a calf or a cat, nay garlic and onions, were more lucrative divinities in lower Egypt, than kneph had ever been in the upper.

But farther: it was not the first philosophy alone that was thus corrupted, but every other part of science that could be wrested and misapplied to the same purposes. The priesthood held it, in Egypt and in the other countries from whence the Greeks derived their knowledge, to be a maxim of ecclesiastical policy, and a wise one it was, to keep every part of science like a monopoly in their own hands, and to be of some real use to mankind, in that manner at least. On this principle, they cultivated arithmetic and geometry. Arithmetic might be of use to them in order to calculate the number of their gods and demons, or the revenues they enjoyed, which was no easy task: geometry might help them to set out the bounds of their possessions, and serve to other temporal purposes; for they had not yet discovered, as some modern writers have done, how well geometry may be applied to prove the immortality of the soul, and to the solution of other metaphysical and theological problems. But they had still more use for physic and astronomy, to both of which they applied themselves with industry and success, and both of which they made subservient to their great design. "Medicina animi," physic for the soul, was the title of some books of Mercury, that were carried in the famous procession described by

Clement of Alexandria. It may be, that the principles and rules of theurgic magic were laid down in those sacred writings, and that the Egyptian priests pretended to raise themselves and others, by the observation of these rules, to such a communion with the gods, as to employ their divine power and knowledge whenever they were necessary. But the physic conversant about bodily substances only, produced another sort of magic which may be called natural; since it consisted in this, that the effects of causes very natural were ascribed by ignorant people, not indeed always and absolutely, to a supernatural power, but always to a power and knowledge above those of any other men than their magicians; and that a good chemist was deemed, like our Friar Bacon, a conjurer. Thus again astronomy, which had been cultivated long under the name of astrology, dwindled into that contemptible science which is at this day so justly distinguished from it. From considering the motions, men grew attentive to the supposed influences of the stars; and that ridiculous scene of fraud opened itself, which continues still to impose in the east, where astrologers, who cannot make an almanac, govern princes and nations, by pretending to read their destinies in the sky.

The whole system of mythology and pagan theology was so absurd, that it could not have been introduced into common belief, if it had not begun to be so, like other absurd systems of religion, in times of the darkest ignorance, and among creatures as irrational as Greenlanders, Samojedes, or Hottentots; if after that, error and knowledge growing up together, the former had not outgrown the other, and maintained itself against the improvements of human reason and of knowledge, by the force of habit; and finally, if legislators had not thought it dangerous to cure, and useful to confirm superstition: and yet, after all, much art was necessary to keep it in repute, besides the craft that has been already mentioned, as well as to make it answer the design of legislators.

Allegories that passed for facts, the fraud of oracles, the impertinence of parables that pretended to some meaning, and of fables that pointed at none, except it was to encourage vice by the example of their gods, composed an outward religion, supported a ridiculous worship, and served to amuse the vulgar; for in divine matters, the marvellous, the improbable, nay the impossible and the unintelligible, make the strongest impressions on vulgar minds. It has been said, that mysteries are designed to exercise our faith, and allegories our understanding; but nothing can be more foolishly said. A mystery, that is, a thing unknown, may exercise our understanding just as well as our faith, and can in truth exercise neither. We may have faith in

an authority we know, but it is faith in this authority, and not properly in the mystery, which makes us acquiesce in it. An allegory may be contrived to puzzle and perplex the understanding, or to hold out nothing to us but itself. In the first case it is impertinent, in the second it is fradulent, and in both it perverts the sole use it should be employed for, in the didactic, or even in the poetical style. Such allegories become, at best, and when they have really some meaning, a sort of riddles: they are fit to exercise the sagacity, and to be the intellectual amusement of children alone, and yet they have been the pride of great geniuses. Josephus, who was a Jew and a cabalist, admired them much: and he tells a silly story, on the authority of Menander of Ephesus, to give them credit, or to raise our ideas of the wisdom of Solomon, Hiram, and Abdemon. The two first had, it seems, a curious correspondence, in which they proposed riddles to one another, and the Tyrian paid most of the forfeits, till Abdemon taught him to pose the wisest of men. Plato,* who disgraced philosophy as much as Homer elevated poetry by the use of allegory, declared that this poet, whom he banished in another mood out of his commonwealth, should not be read by any who were not initiated in wisdom; that is, who were not able to draw an hidden sense out of his writings; that is, who were not able to make their own inventions pass for the signification of his fables, and the interpretation of his allegories. Allegory, in the true intention of it, is designed to make clearer as well as stronger impressions on the mind; and, therefore, as they who pretend to foretell future events should be suspected of imposture, when they deliver their predictions, like those who governed the oracles of the heathen world, in obscure and equivocal terms, that may be applied afterwards, as they often were, to different and even contrary events; so they, who pretend to teach divine truths in allegorical, symbolical, or any mysterious language, deserve to be suspected of imposture likewise. There may be good reasons for concealing, there can never be any such for disguising, which is a degree of falsifying truth. If men reasoned a little better than they do commonly, and were a little less blinded by prejudices, they would not be such bubbles as to receive on one authority what comes to them really on another. The obscure prophecy, and the abstruse doctrine, when one is interpreted, and the other explained, are not so properly the prophecy of the prophet, nor the doctrine of the doctor, as they are such of the persons who apply the prophecy to some particular event, and determine the doctrine to some particular sense, neither of which was possibly intended by them.

* In Alcib.

Rapin says, in his comparison of Plato and Aristotle, that the symbolical theology of the Egyptians seemed to them the most respectful manner of treating divine subjects: and he quotes Jamblicus for this observation, that they thought themselves obliged to imitate nature on these occasions, who hides the perfections of the mind under the outward veil of the body. Now the first of these excuses will appear ridiculous enough, if we refer it only to the opinions of men. But if we refer it to any divine revelation, it is still more egregiously absurd. The last is an allegorical excuse for allegory, worthy of Jamblicus, and little worthy of a remark. But the Jesuit gives, in the same paragraph, the true and universal reason, so universal and so true, that I wonder at him for giving it, of all figurative theology. "The priests," he says, "who had the keeping of these mysteries, authorised this method to support their credit, and to draw veneration to themselves by the respect for those holy things which they hid from the eyes of the people, that they might not be profaned."

I cannot let this subject go, without taking notice of what my Lord Bacon says upon it, in the preface to his treatise, which he calls "De Sapientiâ," and might have called more properly "De futilitate sive de insania veterum." In that, he makes parables and allegories so essential to religion, that he affirms, that to take them away is to forbid almost all commerce of things divine and human.* Whatever reasons this great author had to make such a declaration, it was rashly made. The expression is allegorical, but the meaning it of is obvious; and therefore I say, that as far as man is concerned in carrying this commerce on, we are justified in suspecting it of enthusiasm or fraud; since allegory has been always a principal instrument of theological deception. The chancellor admits, that it serves to involve and conceal, "ad involucrum et velum," which is in direct contradiction to its proper use, for that is to enlighten and illustrate, "ad lumen et illustrationem." He chose to say nothing of the former, rather than to be engaged in disputes, "potius quam lites suscipiamus," and we may add, rather than offend the clergy. For me who think it much better not to write at all, than to write under any restraint from delivering the whole truth of things as it appears to me; who should think so, if I was able to write and go to the bottom of every subject as well as he; and who have no cavils nor invectives to fear, when I confine the communication of my thoughts to you and a very few friends, as I do in writing these essays; I shall repeat what

* ——cum ejusmodi velis et umbris religio gaudeat, ut qui eas tollat commercia divinorum et humanorum ferè interdicat.

I have said already, that the philosopher or divine, who pretends to instruct others by allegorical expressions without an immediate, direct, and intelligible application of the allegory to some proposition or other, has nothing in his thoughts but the supposed allegory, and is mad enough to deceive himself, or knave enough to attempt to impose on those he pretends to instruct. If he has anything there which he distrusts, and dares not venture to expose naked and stripped of allegory to the undazzled eye of reason, it is too much even to insinuate in such a case, and especially on subjects of the first philosophy. We may compare such theology as this to those artificial beauties, who hide their defects under dress and paint: "pars minima est ipsa puella sui."

If we suppose the Supreme Being concerned in this commerce, as it is called, we suppose what is very profane and audacious. I apply my Lord Bacon's words, "profanum quiddam sonat et audax." Can any thing be more so, than a supposition that the God of truth communicates with men by a wretched human expedient, contrived by them to deceive one another, or to help their imperfect faculties in the conception of things, and in the expression of their conceptions? Tully* entertained, in this very respect, much more worthy notions of the divine nature. He argues against the vanity of divination by dreams, in answer to his brother, on this principle. If they come from the gods, they are sent for the sake of man; and if they are sent for the sake of man, we ought to believe that all such advertisements must be intelligible to man.† Obscure dreams therefore cannot be such advertisements. They would be repugnant to the majesty of the gods.‡ When God speaks to his creature, it will be always in terms plain and precise. "Hoc ne feceris. Hoc facito." Thou shalt have none other gods but me. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The Stoics thought to evade this objection against divination by dreams, when they set up their sage, that ideal being, for the sole diviner.§ But Tully laughed at all these pretensions to a supernatural virtue and knowledge, which Chrysippus made necessary to divination.—He affirmed he knew no person who had them, and concluded from thence, that, if he should allow divination, there would be no one found to divine.‖ Thus may we laugh too, and affirm

* De Divin. l. 2.

† Intelligi à nobis dii velle debebant ea, quæ nostra nos monebant. Ibid.

‡ Obscura somnia minimè consentanea sunt majestati deorum. Ibid.

§ ——— Stoici autem tui negant quemquam, nisi sapientem, divinum esse posse. Cic. de Divin. l. 2.

‖ ——— Vide igitur, ne, etiamsi divinationem tibi esse concessero——neminem tamen divinum reperire possimus. Ibid.

on long experience, that, if we allowed theological allegory to come from God with all the pretended types, symbols, and signs, there would be no one found to interpret it, so as to fix the sense of it indisputably: and yet, if the sense be not indisputably fixed, human imposture may pass for divine revelation, and the word of man for the word of God.

If I would enter into such a detail, in this place, it would be easy to collect almost innumerable examples out of Jewish and Christian writers, to excuse the laugh, and to justify the affirmation. But instead of that, I shall content myself with giving one or two instances, that occur to my memory, of the use that was made of interpretations of allegory in the Pagan theology.

Strobœus has preserved a passage of Porphyry, which shows that the Pythagoricians labored to discover the hidden sense of Homer, who had spoke more darkly about gods and demons than any of the ancients, in order to confirm or improve their own theology by his: and he quotes one of these philosophers, Pythagoreus Chronius, who seemed to make the poet's doctrine conformable to his own, rather than to make his own conformable to the poet's.* But the Stoics were remarkable above all others for putting Homer and the rest of the poets to this use. Hesiod was put to the same use, and his fables and allegories served to the same impertinent purpose as those of Homer did. His poem was to some, what he professes at the entrance of it that he intended it should be, a theological rhapsody concerning the generations of gods. It was to others a mere physical allegory concerning the formation of the visible world; and accordingly we find that Velleius accuses Zeno, in the first book of the Nature of the Gods, of misinterpreting Hesiod by attributing the names of Jupiter, of Juno and Vesta to inanimate beings alone. Varro, it is said, did the same: and thus the poem became to some a theogonia, and to others a cosmogonia. Another instance of the success philosophers had in their interpretations of allegories and fables, and of their end in making these interpretations, follows that which has been quoted: for after speaking of what Chrysippus had written in his first book of the nature of the gods, Cicero's interlocutor adds, that this philosopher endeavored in the second, to accommodate the fables of Orpheus, Musæus, Hesiod and Homer to what he had advanced, "ut etiam veterrimi poetæ, qui hæc ne suspicati quidem sint, Stoici fuisse videantur." That the most ancient poets, who had not even a suspicion that there were any such doctrines, might seem to have been Stoicians. Such examples as these are

* Nec tam se ad poetæ opiniones, quam poetam ad suas accommodare nititur.

so far opposite, that they serve to show how ill fitted allegory is to preserve the true sense of any doctrine, and that an allegorical system is easily made a nose of wax, to be turned any way that the interpreters of it please.

Whilst paganism was thus muffled up in allegory to amuse the vulgar, and to maintain and propagate superstition, another art, in some degree the reverse of this, was employed to promote the true ends of natural religion, and the more effectual reformation of the manners of men. The art I mean is that which instituted rites and ceremonies to be performed, and doctrines to which they were relative to be taught in secret. Ancient writers, pagans and Christians, speak much of these mysteries, for such they were called: the former with veneration, the latter often with an abhorrence, that little became those who imitated them in so many instances, and who suffered their own mysterious rites to run easily into the very same abuses, into which the others degenerated late. To attempt a minute and circumstantial account of these mysteries, and even to seem to give it, would require much greater knowledge of antiquity than I pretend to have, or would take the trouble of acquiring. They who attempt it have been, and always will be, ridiculously and vainly employed, whilst they treat this subject as if they had assisted at the celebration of these mysteries, or had at least been drivers of the ass who carried the machines and implements that served in the celebration of them. They write dogmatically about things which could not be known authentically, nor in a detail of particulars, at the time they were in practice. Diagoras, the Melian, was proscribed at Athens* for revealing, or pretending to reveal them: and the poet Æschylus† had like to have been massacred on a bare suspicion that the people took at a representation of one of his plays, of something which alluded to them. In a word, these rites were kept secret under the severest penalties above two thousand years ago. How can we hope to have them revealed to us now, by the help of tradition, or history, wherein we find the relations of other things which were of public notoriety much later so imperfect and dubious? I pretend, therefore, to nothing more than the mention of a few general notions concerning these mysteries, which seem probable to me: whatever weight you lay upon them, about which I am not over solicitous, they will be sufficient for my present purpose and for your information. They will serve to show how men came nearer and nearer to the knowledge of the true God, and a more rational worship.

The theology and the mythology of the heathen world were

* Suidas.

† Clem. Alex. Strom. l. 2.

no doubt vastly increased by poets, who indulged their imaginations without any other view perhaps than the ornament of their works, and by philosophers, who having, like Plato, more imagination than knowledge, endeavored to conceal their ignorance under the veil of allegorical physics and chimerical metaphysics. Thus gods and demons and other hypothetical beings were multiplied. Festivals and public devotions multiplied with them. Superstition spread, and external religion, which was made up of nothing else, flourished. But they who instituted religion, for the sake of government, saw that such religion as this would not be sufficient alone to answer their end, nor enforce effectually the obligations of public and private morality. It looked no farther than the present system of things, and in this they observed no settled distinction made by their gods between the religious and the irreligious, the best and the worst of men. It was not sufficient, they thought therefore, either to justify the providence of the gods, or to determine the conduct of men. The imaginary unjust distribution of good and evil, had been at all times a great stumbling-block to theistical philosophers: and we see accordingly that hypotheses, contrived to solve the difficulty, had obtained in an antiquity beyond our oldest traditions. Such was that of the good and evil principle. Such was that of a future state of rewards and punishments, and of a metempsychosis. Now what they had put to a philosophical, they put to a political use: and the last of these was at least one principal, and I suppose the principal, doctrine taught in the mysteries that they instituted.

The mysteries of Isis and those of Mithras seem to have been the most ancient: and the former were those which Inachus and Orpheus carried into Greece. What they were in their original institution, how they were propagated in several countries under the invocation, to use an expression of your church, of different divinities, what alterations from one to another they received, or how those of Eleusis came to be more universal and more revered than the rest, I am unable to tell, and you I believe not much concerned to know. But if you ask me how they came to be called mysteries, though their principal doctrine, the doctrine of a future state, was publicly known, as I think it was, my answer is ready. This doctrine, although known, and the solemn rites that belonged to it were mysteries among the Pagans, just as the doctrines and rights of baptism and the Lord's supper were mysteries in the first ages of the Christian church. A general and confused notion of them transpired. But neither these doctrines, nor the mystical rites and ceremonies, were explained even to the catechumens, and much less to others. Nay the whole inward doctrine of the eucharisty was not opened to all

those who received it, to those whom St. Austin calls "tardiores:" and the reason he gives for this reserve, is, that they might not despise what they saw, "ne contemnant quod vident." He thought, it seems, that no explanation would prevent this so effectually as an air of mystery maintained by the figurative and enigmatical terms, in which the fathers affected to speak on all such subjects to the public. This precaution was carried so far, that a curtain was drawn to hide the altar and the priest from the sight of the congregation, when he was about to consecrate, as I remember to have read in some of your writers.— Several ages past, before the pastors of the church thought it safe to let the people know, that a few genuflections, a few signs of the cross, a few thumps on the breast, and the muttering of a few words, were sufficient to draw God down from heaven and to transubstantiate bread and wine into his flesh and blood.

This air of mystery produced not only the negative good that has been mentioned, it produced likewise a positive good of much consequence. The Christian fathers found it necessary, on one hand, to admit converts through several stages of preparation into the church, and, on the other, to keep up the fervor of these candidates for regeneration, and the consequence of it, salvation. The expedient of mystery answered both purposes. It kept them out of the whole secret, as long as that was necessary: and it excited in the mean time their curiosity, and holy impatience to be in it. St. Austin, who mentions the first, mentions the second purpose. He speaks, in one of his epistles, of the public prayers made to God, that he would inspire the catechumens with a desire of regeneration; "ut eis desiderium regenerationis inspiraret:" and in another part of his works, he avows the human means that were employed for a very human reason, a reason drawn from the weakness of the human mind. He says, that although the catechumens could have borne a communication of the sacraments to them, this was not done, however, that the more honorably these sacraments were hid, the more earnestly this communication might be desired by them. "Etsi catechumenis sacramenta fidelium non produntur; non ideo sit, quod ea ferre non possunt; sed ut ab eis tanto ardentiûs concupiscantur, quanto honorabiliûs occultantur."

Other authorities might be cited, and other instances produced, if they were necessary; for this was the general policy of the Christian church. But there is no need of any authority to confirm that of St. Austin, in such a case as this: and the two instances I have brought are sufficient to show, for what reasons mystery was established in the heathen devotions, by showing those for which it was introduced and maintained in the Christian devotions. The latter, in this respect, were copies of the

former: and these copies, which we have in our hands, enable us to judge of the originals, which we have not.

The Christians, the primitive Christians themselves, could not revere their sacred mysteries more than the pagans did theirs. They could not prepare for them, nor assist at them, with greater attention of mind, with greater purity of heart, nor with greater reverence and awe, than the pagans prepared for and assisted at theirs. The pagans confessed their crimes: and they went through public and private purgations, which we may call penitences, long before they could be admitted to initiation. Such, for instance, as abstinence from women and from several sorts of food, with different austerities that are mentioned by Porphyry, and that writer of Milesian tales, Apuleius; after which the public proclamation "procul ite profani," and the private examination of every one who presented himself, "an purus ades?" followed constantly. No man, who was noted for crimes, durst be a candidate for initiation: and Nero, as much an emperor and a tyrant as he was, durst not present himself as such, after he had killed his mother. We find the dispositions, and the manner, in which they were required to assist at these mysterious rites and ceremonies, described in terms that might edify the most pious and orthodox ears. Let me quote the first that occurs to me, though it is not the strongest that might be produced with the pains of a little search. The passage is in that oration, which Tully made on the occasion of some answers given by the haruspices, whom the senate had consulted. In that oration, speaking of those mysteries which Clodius had polluted, and exaggerating the crime, he takes notice that they were such as forbid, not only curious, but even wandering eyes, and excluded not only the wicked but the imprudent. "Non solum curios oculos excludit, sed etiam errantes—quò non modò improbitas, sed ne imprudentia quidem, possit intrare." Such was the general character, such the particular behaviour, required of the persons initiated into these sacred mysteries: and the excitements to the observation of all that was thus required, could not be greater; since they are summed up by Tully, who had been initiated himself, in this, that the initiated learned how to live with joy and to die with better hopes; "cum lætitia vivendi rationem, et cum spe meliore moriendi."* They were raised "ad præsentiam et participationem deorum," says Jamblicus, a blessing which the Egyptians first enjoyed, according to him. Their souls were purged and purified, till they became such as they were in their original state, and before their descent into the prison of the body. When they left the body, they

* Cic. de Leg. l. 2.

took their flight at once to the islands of the blessed, nay they became gods, or like to gods, according to some seraphic doctors of Platonician divinity; whilst those of the profane, unpurged, unpurified, and clogged by the gross affections of the body, stuck in dirt and wallowed in mire.*

SECTION IV.

It is easy to conceive, by this short account of the heathen mysteries, how well this inward religion, for such I may call it in contradistinction to vulgar paganism, was calculated to form some particular men to virtue and piety, and to promote by consequence so far the good of society, which was the great end of the first legislators, by means more reasonable than those of vulgar religion. The celebration of these mysteries lasted several days, and returned often enough to afford frequent opportunities of initiation to those of both sexes who were desirous of it, as well as of confirmation and improvement to those who had been already initiated. Lessons of morality were thus frequently renewed, habits of piety were solemnly maintained, and to enforce them all, that great sanction, which consists in the rewards and punishments of another life, and which had been added very wisely to the law of nature by human institution, and in belief at least, if not originally and by divine institution, was inculcated so, that every man must apply it to himself, and the impression be lasting.

It may be said, perhaps, that no reformation of manners, no degree of virtue and piety, beyond those which vulgar paganism was sufficient to procure, can be justly ascribed to these institutions; whereas they maintained much, at least, of the same rank polytheism in belief, and the same rank idolatry in practice. If this be said, the objection will be easily answered, so far as it relates to the effect they had, by running a parallel, as I shall do in another essay, between pagan and Christian reformation of manners; for if it appears, as I think it will, that the latter has in this respect on the whole no advantage to boast above the former, some reformation must be allowed to have been wrought by the pagan system of religion; after which there can remain no dispute whether this reformation was owing to the inward and hidden, rather than to the outward and public, part of this system.

But I consider here the theology and religion of the heathen

* In cœno et luto volutari. Diog. Laert.

with regard to their nature, not to their effects, and I shall proceed therefore to observe, that by the mysteries hitherto spoken of, I mean only such as are called the lesser, and as seem to have been preparatory to the greater, which remain to be spoken of. There were certain stages through which men were admitted by slow steps into the whole mystery of Christianity. So they were admitted likewise into that of heathenism. The first legislators contented themselves to establish a vulgar religion, in compliance with the ignorance and superstition of the savage vulgar. But they prepared, at the same time, the means of supplying its defects, and of leading men little by little, and by such a progression as their different talents and characters rendered them capable of making, to a better knowledge of natural theology and natural religion, from fiction to truth, from allegory to that which allegory was intended to signify. There was a state of purgation, a state of initiation, and a state of consummation. The first two were, I believe, those of the lesser, and the last that of the greater mysteries.

He who has been curious to examine the religious notions of rude, ignorant, and half stupid people, in the pale of the Christian church as well as out of it, will not be apt to wonder that there were many in the heathen world who remained contented with the vulgar religion, and little curious about the mysteries; nor that they were led rather by example than by reflection to initiation, when it became almost as general among them as baptism is among us, and to the belief of a future state. Now such as these might have been revolted against the mysteries, if they had found the gods they were accustomed to adore wholly degraded in them. These gods therefore were to keep their places in some sort, "suus cuique honos;" though many fabulous stories about them were exploded, or else were represented as allegories not facts, and explained in a better sense. The doctrine too of a future state of rewards and punishments, would have made less impression on such minds, perhaps, if it had not been taught to the eyes, as well as to the ears, by solemn ceremonies and pompous shows. Ceremonies, therefore, and shows seem to have been instituted, and to have been made parts of these mysteries. But then there were other persons, and the number of these increased as philosophy came to be more and more cultivated, who could not bear to have the absurdities of polytheism, however mitigated, imposed upon them in any sort, nor think it religion to worship men who had been made gods by poetical license, with all their vices about them. They could not assist at the ridiculous rites of idolatry, nor be spectators of all the puppet-shows of devotion, without being provoked to laughter or to indignation.

I can easily believe, that the foolish creeds, and the burlesque rites of paganism were rendered, in the preparatory mysteries, a little less shocking to the common sense of those in whom knowledge began to get the better of prejudice. But this reformation and improvement could not be carried far at once. Allegory served to disguise ignorance, and to muffle up even knowledge in mystery among the vulgar. To cure this abuse, to take off these masks, and to lay allegory aside whenever it did not serve to illustrate truth, and to improve or facilitate knowledge, required time: and men, who had been bred in darkness, were to be accustomed to the light by degrees. This, I imagine, that the mysteries did, and were contrived to do. If too much light had been let in at once upon the initiated, they would have been dazzled and hurt by it. Rather than suffer the grossest objects of their superstition to be suddenly removed, these idiots might have clung to them the more closely: just as we have seen in France, that popular tumults have arisen when some bishops have attempted to take away images, and to forbid devotions, in which the common people had been too long indulged, by the connivance or by the fraud of their pastors. On the other hand, the reformation of vulgar religion, which was wrought by the lesser mysteries, was too little certainly for those who were able to frame true notions of a Supreme Being, and of the worship due to him from his creatures. Thus it became necessary to make a sort of political composition with error: it became necessary for the institutors of religions to separate the few from the many, and to carry the first on alone from initiation to consummation, from the lesser to the greater mysteries. There are good, and, I think, sufficient grounds to be persuaded, that the whole system of polytheism was unravelled in the greater mysteries, or that no more of it was retained than what might be rendered consistent with monotheism, with the belief of one Supreme self-existent Being. Now on the principles on which this was done, some of the established ceremonies of vulgar religion might seem quite innocent, and others might be tolerated. Some indulgence, and even a kind of occasional conformity, to them could not be safely refused, in countries where such superstitions had long prevailed; where they were incoporated into the very frame of government, and where powerful bodies of men had a particular interest in the support of them.

SECTION V.

Since I have mentioned the compatibility of some remains of the grossest polytheism with monotheism, and the principles on

which the few might conform to the many, at least in the exteriors of religion; it is necessary that I should explain myself on these heads, which contain the sum of theology or the first philosophy, as it was understood by the most intelligent of the heathen, even in those countries where idolatry seemed to triumph the most.

It cannot be proved, without the help of the Old Testament, nor very well with it, as I have hinted above, that the unity of God was the primitive belief of mankind: neither does it appear to my apprehension, that in fact it could be so, according to all the rules of judging that may be drawn from reason and analogy. But yet I think it sufficiently evident, from reason and analogy both, that this first and great principle of natural theology could not fail to be discovered, as soon as some men began to contemplate themselves and all the objects that surrounded them, and to push their philosophical researches up from causes that must be the effects of other causes to a first, intelligent, self existent cause of all things. Accordingly, we find that this discovery had been made in Egypt, and all the eastern nations that were famous for learning and knowledge, long before the dates of our most ancient memorials: whereas the same discovery does not appear to have been made by those people, whom we are able to view in these memorials, before they emerged out of ignorance into the light of knowledge and philosophical truth.

If I would descend into particular proofs, to confirm by the testimony of ancient writers, what I advance on a probability that reason and analogy will support, I should not be at a loss to furnish them. But I consider that the work is done to my hands, in a much better manner than I should be able to do it, and that it would be ridiculous to display my little pedlar's shop of learning before you, when so immense a storehouse of it lies open in the true intellectual system of the universe. There you will find a full and superabundant collection of proofs that demonstrate, beyond a possibility of doubting, the unity of God to have been acknowledged by the most ancient of the idolatrous nations; though they may not demonstrate, as I think they do not, that this was the primitive faith of mankind: because we see that the things of this world are in a perpetual rotation, and because in several countries, at several periods, men may have gone from idolatry to true religion, and have fallen from this back again into idolatry, as we know divers nations have gone from barbarity to politeness, and then have finished the round, and have returned from politeness to barbarity. Eusebius, and a multitude of other writers after him, would have us believe, that it was the particular prerogative of God's chosen people to be in possession of this knowledge,

though the contrary may be proved, even from his own writings, as well as by the confession of St. Austin, and of other fathers of the church: and Josephus* asserts, that Abraham was the first who dared to say, that there is but one God. Abraham seems, according to this historian, to have derived his knowledge of the one true God from philosophical observation and meditation, before he became so well acquainted with the Supreme Being as he was afterwards, when God entered into a covenant with him. He could not derive it by tradition from his ancestors; since Josephus and Philo, and many of the rabbins, affirm, that the father of the faithful was bred an idolater. Shall we think it strange now, that other men should discover, by their meditations on the works of God, what Abraham discovered? Has this fundamental article then of all true theology, so little proportion to our clear and best determined ideas? Or is it so repugnant to all the phenomena of nature? Much otherwise. It is so well proportioned to one, and so agreeable to both, that we should be justly surprised to observe the affectation of restraining this knowledge to the patriarchs and their descendants, if it was not as easy as it is to discern that the Jews meant to do greater honor to their nation, and to reflect greater authority on their revelation, and that the Christians thought it proper to maintain this groundless assertion, in order to show the preparation for, as well as the necessity of, a new revelation to the Jews and Gentiles both.

But let us not be deceived, by the vanity of one, nor by the artifice of the other. God never left himself without a witness, which witness is the whole system of his works; though human reason must be cultivated to discover this, as well as other truths, and though it has not been therefore discovered alike by all people, and at all times. All truth requires some search, and many are to be acquired by labor. But there is no one that requires less labor than this, as there is no one that deserves or rewards our search so well. Thus I think, and in thinking thus I adore the goodness of the Supreme Being. Bishop Wilkins† says, in his principles of natural religion, that "the things which distinguish human nature from all other things are the chief principles and foundations of religion, namely, the apprehension of a deity, and an expectation of a future state after this life, which no other creature below man doth partake of——it is not reason in the general, which is the form of human nature, because there are some degrees of ratiocination discernible in the brute creation, and such a natural sagacity as at least bears a near resemblance to reason." Thus the good bishop makes the

* Ant. Jud. l. i, c. 7. † L. 2, c. i.

difference between reason in man and in other animals very rightly to consist in the degree, not in the kind, without perceiving how far this concession of an apparent truth would carry him in the dispute about souls, and material and immaterial spirits. But even in the case before us it will not serve his purpose, nor evince that reason, as it is determined to actions of religion, is the particular form of human nature. It will prove at most that some men have, and that no other species of animals has in general, nor in particular instances, the faculty we call reason in such a degree, as to render them capable of discovering the existence of the Supreme Being, and the duties of natural religion. I said some men, because even among the creatures that are all commonly, but perhaps erroneously, comprehended in this species on account of their outward form, there are stupid savages of whom it seems lawful to doubt, whether they are able to make greater discoveries concerning God and religion, than the half reasoning elephant. Upon the whole matter, they who suppose all men incapable to attain a full knowledge of natural theology and religion without revelation, take from us the very essence and form of man, according to the bishop, and deny that any of us have that degree of reason, which is necessary to distinguish our species, and sufficient to lead us to the unity of a first intelligent cause of all things.

Now since the unity of God might be known by a due use of human reason, and since it was actually known to the ancient legislators, who established the mysteries spoken of for the support of religion, and religion for the support of government, it cannot seem marvellous, that this doctrine was taught in the celebration of the greater mysteries. The marvel would be, if it had not been taught in them. But then there is as little room to wonder, that the same men should establish the belief of a divine monarchy, as they did establish it. By degrading the pagan gods, they destroyed the aristocracy of heaven: and by reasoning from human ideas of order, they ran of course into an hypothesis, which has been adopted in some manner or other by the Jewish, the Christian, the Mahometan, and every other system of theology. They supposed that the making and governing the world required the ministration of a multitude of inferior beings, beings not eternal, but produced in time by emanation, or by some other inconceivable manner of generation; concerning all which there has been more absurdity propagated by Pagans and Christians, whether heretics or orthodox, than all the bedlams of the world can match. When they reasoned *à posteriori*, from the works to the existence of one God, they reasoned well, and they arrived at truth. But when they reasoned

in the same manner from economical and political institutions of human wisdom, they reasoned ill, and fell into error. This error however was pious error: and pious error is more excusable than pious fraud. They dared not presume to suppose the supreme, incomprehensible and ineffable Being employed constantly, nor at all immediately, about human affairs, and yet they thought divine providence necessary in the general conduct of these, as they discerned plainly that it was necessary to preserve and rule the great machine of the universe. Much less dared they suppose this Being to be the tutelary local divinity of any one people, and much less still to be an earthly king in the literal acceptation of the word. They were not enough familiarised with the belief of divine revelations, to frame such conceptions as these.

Some of their philosophers, indeed, refined so sublimely their speculations about the Supreme Being, that they grew quite unintelligible. God was, in their conceit, above all essence, though existent, above all intelligence, though intelligent. He was in all things,

"Jupiter est quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris."

He pervaded, he animated the whole world, and like the soul gave life and motion to all the parts of it. In him they lived, and moved, and had their being. Some of these men, therefore, whilst they seemed to worship the parts of this visible corporeal system, might really worship the invisible God alone, in the various manifestations of his wisdom, energy and power. I say some of them; because it must be confessed, that some, even of those who had been consummated by admission into the greatest mysteries, were not entirely orthodox on this head. They adopted notions more intelligible, and less unworthy of the Deity than many that have been mentioned, but such however as had too near an analogy to man and to the affairs of mankind. They imagined a divine monarchy on a human plan, the administration of which was not carried on by the immediate agency of God himself, but mediately, as in terrestrial monarchies, by that of inferior agents, according to the ranks and the provinces allotted to them. Such were the celestial gods, the sun, the moon, the stars, or the spirits more properly who inhabited and presided in them, who directed their motions, and maintained their influences. Such again, but in a lower order, were the ethereal and aërial demons, the genii and the lares, who dwell below the moon, and had little else in charge but what related to man, and even to particular men. Such again were the heroes and public benefactors, who might well be admitted into the celestial hierarchy; for by the very doctrine of the mysteries, private devo-

tions, and the exercise of private virtues could render men like to gods here, and gods hereafter.

Since greater purity of manners, and a more internal devotion were required of the initiated than of the vulgar, it is but reasonable to conclude, that in the mysteries the gods were reformed as well as their worshippers, that Jupiter was no longer the whore-master he had been represented, nor Mercury the pimp, nor Venus the common strumpet, and so on. But still it must be confessed, that those fictitious divinities, which superstition and poetry had invented, which the lesser mysteries had preserved, and which the greater had tolerated, were alike numerous and ridiculous, as well as the rites and ceremonies instituted in honor of them, and practised even by those who were consummated in the greater mysteries. Thus in the Eleusinian orgia, for instance, not to quote those of Bacchus, the most extravagant and the soonest corrupted of any, the wanderings of Ceres in search of her daughter were dramatically represented: and the initiated ran about like frantic people with lighted torches in their hands.

If this apparent idolatry moves your indignation, call to mind the distinction of a worship of Latria and a worship of Dulia. They who acknowledged but one God, could pay the first to that God alone: they could not be idolaters. They might honor the other divinities, as your church honors her saints, by the second. If this ridiculous worship moves your laughter, have a care: it was in those days just as it is in ours, and in paganism just as it is in Christianity. The intelligent pagans, who were consummated in the mysteries, could explain away, no doubt, some of the apparent absurdities of these rites, and give good prudential reasons for their compliance with others. Celsus had boasted that he was fully acquainted with the Christian religion, and on that supposed acquaintance had presumed to censure it. Origen as I find him quoted by Cudworth, shows Celsus that it was not less impertinent in him to pretend to be well informed of Christian theology, than it would be in a stranger who sojourned in Egypt to pretend to be well informed of the Egyptian theology, though he had not been instructed in the mysteries of it by the priests who were alone able to instruct him. Origen adds, that not only among the Egyptians, but among all other nations, who had besides their religious fables a secret doctrine, the religious rites were performed rationally by ingenious persons, whilst the superficial vulgar looked no further in the observation of them than the external symbol or ceremony. This was a full answer to Celsus: and so far Origen makes the case of paganism and Christianity the same.

Now if they were the same in his time, sure I am they are the

same in this respect in ours: and that you may see this the more clearly, and learn not to pass too rash a censure on the poor pagans, let us feign for a moment that Abammon, or any other heathen priest you please, is risen from the dead. He is curious in the first place to visit Egypt and the East; but he finds them subdued by ignorant and barbarous people, and no traces left of their ancient civility, policy, and erudition. The countries devasted, the cities laid in ruins, and none of the colleges of the learned to be found. He hastens away to the West, for he is told that in those regions that border on the Atlantic sea arts and sciences have revived, and philosophy has fixed her throne. As he advances thither, he finds some faint resemblance of the plenty and of the magnificence of ancient Egypt. Stately temples strike his eye, and excite his curiosity the most. He observes that one is dedicated to the Trinity. He takes this to be some triad into which Typho had mangled the deity, and he laments that Isis had not joined the parts again together; for he cannot be supposed to know what the Nicean council has decreed for this purpose. He observes, that another is dedicated to the mother of God, and imagines that Cybele may be adored in it. Others he observes in great number, and all distinguished by some particular invocation. Whilst he is thus employed, a procession comes by. Abammon sees with pleasure the priests of Isis attend it in their white garments, and with their heads shaved according to the Egyptian rite; but he is at a loss to guess what a cross of wood, which is carried before them, can mean. He remembers, that malefactors were executed in some countries on such an instrument of cruelty; and therefore his surprise increases when he is told that the Son of God suffered on it to satisfy divine justice, and to expiate the sins of mankind. This calls to his mind perhaps the human sacrifices that were so long in use among the Phœnicians and other nations. But he is still in doubt; for among them men were sacrificed to appease the gods, and here a god is the victim. He follows the procession into one of the temples. The service begins; he gets as near the altar as he can. He sees no preparations for any sacrifice, but observes that the priest holds something white and round in his hand. He asks what it is, and is told that it is a wafer. He observes him pour some liquor into a cup. He asks, and is told that it is wine. A moment after the priest having held up this wafer and this cup successively over his head, the people prostrate themselves in acts of adoration. They bid him do the same; for they assure him that the wafer is become the body, and the wine, the blood, of God. The service over, he has time to survey the church. He sees altars on every side, and pictures or statues over all. He sees tapers and lamps burning even by

day. The pictures and statues he concludes to be the gods of this people, and the tapers and lamps to have been lighted at some sacred fire, at that perhaps which Zoroaster brought from heaven. He stares at an old man with a long beard, looking out of the clouds at a young man tied to a stake and whipped, and at a white pigeon hovering in the midst of the picture. As he proceeds on his journey of curiosity, he sees in another temple the same old man talking to a beautiful virgin, the virgin seeming to receive orders from him, and thrusting a little child head foremost into a mill, four monstrous beasts, such as Africa never produced, assisting twelve venerable persons to turn the mill, before which an arch-priest, with a triple crown on his head, and a golden cup in his hand, is represented kneeling.— The arch-priest receives wafers that fall from the mill into the cup. He gives them to a man who wears a red cap; the man of the red cap gives them to one who wears a broad pointed cap; he of the broad pointed cap gives them to one who wears a square black cap; and he of the black cap doles them about to the people. Abammon observes over the door of the same temple an animal that has four heads, the head of a man, the head of an ox, the head of an eagle, and the head of a lion. He observes an ass to whom peculiar respect seems to be paid, and whole flocks of sheep and whole droves of cattle. These he takes for symbols; and they have so plain an allusion to those of Egypt, when Egypt was the mistress of symbolical theology, that Abammon would be ready to carry himself back to his own age and country in imagination, if the herds of swine, that have their place too in this sacred painting, did not give him a good deal of scandal. The people he converses with, swear to him in the most solemn manner, that they adore one God alone, and that they abhor polytheism and idolatry. He hears them, takes his leave, and goes away persuaded that they are polytheists as much, and idolaters more than he or any of his fathers were.— This fable may serve to show you, that it is not only unreasonable, but unsafe to censure any religion rashly and without sufficient information, as pagans have calumniated Judaism and Christianity, and Jews and Christians, Paganism and Mahometanism. The weapons of retaliation are always at hand, though those of defence are not: and we see that even the Christian religion is not invulnerable. But it is time I should proceed to other corruptions of philosophy, of the first especially, and to other forms under which error has been propagated.

SECTION VI.

What has been said above, has been said generally and hypothetically; for what man in his senses would presume to be particular or positive on matters of so great antiquity, and so imperfectly and darkly delivered down on authorities for the most part very precarious? I think, however, that it is probable. It is probable that allegory, the refuge of ignorance, the veil of error, and the instrument of metaphysical and theological deception in its abuse, was one great support of paganism. It rendered the outside of this religion pompous and showish: and this was enough to raise and to maintain a respect and veneration for it in the minds of the vulgar, who never look further than the outside, and who are fond of the marvellous. It is probable that in the mysteries instituted by the first legislators to be a further support of religion, such allegories and symbols as were kept in use, and such as were more rationally invented for instruction, not for deception, were explained in such a manner as to serve all the purposes of morality, and to form men to be better citizens, by making them better men, than it was thought that civil laws and institutions alone could oblige them to be. It is probable, in the last place, that the few who were consummated in these mysteries, and to whom the hidden doctrine was revealed, acknowledged the unity of the Godhead, learned to join a sort of mitigated polytheism with monotheism, and, though they conformed in the public worship, to have their private belief, as I am persuaded that you have yours.

It is plain enough, that the knowledge of the one true God would have been acquired by men, and would have been preserved in the world, if no such people as the Jews had ever been: and nothing can be more impertinent than the hypothesis, that this people, the least fit perhaps on many accounts that could have been chosen, was chosen to preserve this knowledge. It was acquired, and it was preserved independently of them among the heathen philosophers, and it might have become, nay it did probably become, the national belief in countries unknown to us, or even in those who were fallen back into ignorance before they appear in the traditions we have; just as it became the first principle of religion among the inhabitants of the Theban dynasty,* who held that there was no God but one, and this one God was represented under a human figure by some, with an egg, the symbol of the world, coming out of his mouth; with a sceptre

* Plut. de Iside et Osiride.

and a belt in his hand, and with other emblems. Thus he was described by Porphyry, as Eusebius relates; and what other Being can we understand to be meant by this description but that God who spake, and the world was made?

Thus the theology of the heathen was founded on original truth, but was corrupted afterwards, as other theologies have been, in its progress, and by the extension of it. The heathens, at least all of them who deserve to be quoted, acknowledged one sole Supreme Being, the oldest of all Beings, according to Thales, because unmade or unproduced, that is, self-existent, and because he alone is so.* But then they corrupted their ideas of the majesty of this Being, by those which they had of human majesty; for, by meaning to think with more reverence, they thought unworthily of God. They lost sight of him, if I may be allowed such an expression, and suffered inferior imaginary beings to intercept a worship due to him alone. They reasoned so little or so ill, on other notions much better associated with this notion of a God, such as those of omniscience, of omnipresence, and of that energy of omnipotence which is sufficient by one simple act of the will, for thus we must speak to speak intelligibly, to create and govern a universe, that they thought it much more agreeable to nature and truth to account for all the phenomena of the physical and moral worlds by supposing the agency of second and third gods, of supercelestial and celestial divinities, and of demons, than to have recourse to the first God, who dwelt in darkness unpenetrable, or in light that blinded the human sight; for both these images were employed, and both signify the same thing. Thus they attempted to reconcile monotheism with a sort of mitigated polytheism; for such, at least, I think it was rendered by those consummated in the mysteries, and such I called it before; though Plutarch says expressly, in the place I have just now quoted, not only that the most ancient Egyptians held the unity of God, but also that they believed no mortal could be a God; which opinion was sufficient of itself to degrade numberless beings, that went under the vague and equivocal denomination of gods.

This system, made up of monotheism and of something very near akin, nearer than they who held it imagined, to a polytheism, inconsistent with the former, proved itself to be a very rank soil: and immense crops of error sprung up from it, of error more ingenious and more plausible than the superstitious opinions of savage nations, but yet as real. Though the belief of many inferior gods did not destroy the belief of one Supreme, it maintained however a sort of idolatrous worship, since it main-

* Diog. Laer.

tained a sort of polytheism. For as we cannot suppose that the vulgar, the uninitiated, adored the true God even intentionally, so we cannot suppose that the initiated, nor even the consummated, held constantly in mind some such casuistical distinction as that of Latria and Dulia, when they offered sacrifices to other divinities and invoked them directly. That learned man Cudworth seems to think more favorably even of the vulgar, somewhere in his famous fourth chapter: and I am not ignorant that the doctrine of a mediation between God and man was established in the heathen theology. But I know too, that the suspicion I have may be justified by the example of Christians, who hold a mediation likewise: and of these the former seem the most excusable. The Christian believes that he may have access at all times to the throne of grace; but the poor heathen, filled with a religious horror, durst not approach the divine monarch except through the mediation of his ministers. Etherial and aerial demons stood in the lowest rank of superior powers. To these he addressed himself, if they were evil to soften their malice, if they were good to obtain their mediation with the celestial, and by them with the supercelestial gods. He who durst not presume to think that the prayers of men could reach to these, might offer up sacrifices and prayers to those.

Philosophers and priests, who led the multitude in matters of science and religion, were the same men in Egypt and the ancient kingdoms of the East for many ages, how much soever they were distinguished in later times and in other countries. Whilst they continued such, they profited alternately, in one character, of what they did, in another. Philosophers in prose and verse helped to fill the calendar of the priests: and theology became the assistant of philosophy wherever she was wanted. Thus, in the case before us, when philosophers had once established a divine monarchy, at the head of which they placed the first god, enthroned in darkness, or hid by excess of light, creating and governing all things by several orders of inferior beings, there was a sort of gradation formed from man to God most inconsistently with some other of their notions. In favor of this gradation, and to make it appear the shorter, the souls of men were deemed immortal and of a celestial origin. They were raised up, at least, to the very confines of divinity: and demons and beings superior to demons, had little precedence above them, if any. They were confined indeed to human bodies, and degraded to animate these systems of organised matter by a temporary union with them, but they returned afterwards to their proper and kindred stars. The others were confined too, and had their respective powers and provinces allotted to them, in the general government even of sublunary affairs.

Theology did not fail to build on foundations philosophy had laid: and the professors of both improved the opportunity they had of feigning a close correspondence between heaven and earth. They assumed, that they had the means of knowing what was decreed above, that they could disclose the will of the gods, avert their anger, procure their favor, and exercise a coercive power over demons. They imagined spirits that belonged to the several planets, fiery and aerial, aquatic and terrestrial: so that men, and not men alone, but all other animals, plants, metals, and stones, partook of these different natures, and of the different influences which descended from above. The distinction of good and evil demons was extremely useful, in accounting for the physical and moral phenomena; and it doubled the fees of the priests. Accordingly, this distinction had been established in the remotest antiquity, when philosophers did, what they do still, and instead of tracing causes up gradually from their effects, take the less laborious task of inventing them at once and by a sally of imagination. Justin the martyr found our Christian devil precipitated from heaven, in the nineteenth book of Homer's Iliad. Plutarch quotes Empedocles for writing, that the evil demons had been driven from thence by the gods: and you may have the word of Marsilius Ficinus, in his dissertation on the apology of Socrates, that Plato had heard in Egypt how Jupiter cast the impure demons into hell, as well as he had learned from Pherecydes of Syros, either by tradition or by his writings, how several of these spirits had rebelled against God under the conduct of Ophioneus. These reprobate spirits became the instruments, or rather the authors of all physical and moral evil: and the protection of such as had not fallen from this purity was sought to prevent or remove this malignant influence. The one procured to men peace of mind, and health of body. The others inspired lusts, inflamed passions, and, entering into the bodies of men as well as of other animals, tormented and distorted their limbs, and played a thousand extravagant pranks in the wantonness of their power and malice.

Such absurdities as these, and many others which I will not take the trouble to collect, being grafted on a few true principles, composed the theological wisdom of the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, and corrupted the whole mass. I say their theological, for their political and moral wisdom deserves to be mentioned without a sneer. The relations of it, and of the effects of it, which we find in Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, and other ancient authors, inspire us with admiration and respect: and it is not possible to account for the folly and madness of men on these theological subjects, who were so reasonable and so wise on all others, except by resolving it into the vanity of philosophers and

the craft of priests. If these men had pretended to none of this chimerical knowledge, but had contented themselves to teach in the simplicity of truth, the little we are able to know of the divine nature and the first philosophy, their systems, which they had the rage of extending, would have been too narrow for their vanity: and their wealth, which they had the rage of increasing by this lucrative trade, would have been too little for their avarice.

It is hard to say which was greater, the impudence of their pretensions, the art with which they conducted them, or the success they had in imposing them on mankind. The sky was spread like the great volume of fate before them. They and their adepts alone could read in it, and discover the secrets it contained. The whole mystery of celestial influences was known to them alone. They could procure them, remove them, change them, and fix them to certain portions of matter, or even fix the spirits themselves, who directed these influences, to statues prepared by the rules of their magical art. They had mysterious methods of disentangling the soul from corporeal incumberments, and preparing it for every kind of supernatural illumination. The mind was composed for prophetic dreams, the eyes were strengthened for celestial visions. They received inspiration, and they contemplated the gods that gave it. How they understood this contemplation, how they saw the forms of the gods,* and how the presence of the gods was declared to them, might be explained, perhaps, in much as intelligible a manner as the presence of demons in their statues was explained. Suppose a wall of looking-glass, and so disposed at the same time as to occasion an echo.† Your figure and your voice too will be reflected from it, and you will be in some sense in that wall. I hurry over all these impertinences, and I conclude by saying, that from this conspiracy of philosophy and theology, in the establishment of theurgic and natural magic, have proceeded all the folly and knavery of judicial astrology, of horoscopes, of spells, of charms, of talismans, of wizards, of witches, and of rosycrucians, and all the enthusiasm, blasphemy, and superstition that have accompanied these excommunicated persons and things, and that might have been reproached with great reason, upon many occasions, to the orthodox persons themselves who excommunicated both. I say might have been reproached, and I say it with reason: since many of the opinions which these orthodox persons hold, or have held, may be traced up through the same schools, through which the greatest extravagances of

* Præsentiam sæpe divi suam declarant. Sæpe visæ formæ deorum. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

† Mars. Ficin.

astrologers, magicians, and rosycrucians have descended to these days. But we must not stop here. We must pursue the propagation of error in higher instances than these, and in such as prevail under some form or other even at this day, even among men the most enlightened in our enlightened age.

Pagan theists, who deemed it too great presumption to worship the Supreme Being, might well have thought it still more presumptuous to dogmatsie about his nature and attributes: and since they held the unity of the first cause of all things, they should have seen the absurdity and inconsistency of analysing this monad into several principles, and of assuming other supercelestial and superessential beings. All this was done however, the absurdity was put in practice, and the inconsistency was admitted into the first philosophy. Reason was overborne in this case by affections and passions, as reason is in almost every case where that rational animal man is to decide, and excessive curiosity and excessive vanity prevailed against the plainest dictates of common sense. God has proportioned, in every respect, our means of knowledge to our station here, and to our real wants in it. The bodies, that surround us, operate continually on us: and their operations concern not only our well or ill being, but our very being. We are fitted therefore to acquire, by the help of our senses properly employed, by experiment and industry, such a degree of human knowledge about them as is sufficient for the necessary uses of human life, and no more. In like manner, the knowledge of the Creator is on many accounts necessary to such a creature as man: and therefore we are made able to arrive, by a proper exercise of our mental faculties, from a knowledge of God's works to a knowledge of his existence, and of that infinite power and wisdom which are demonstrated to us in them. Our knowledge concerning God goes no further. We are in absolute ignorance of the real essence and inward constitution of every sensible object. How much less reason is there to expect any knowledge of the manner of being, and of the nature and essence of the invisible God, or of his physical and moral attributes, beyond that which his works, the effects of his nature and attributes, communicate to us! This degree, this sufficient degree of knowledge concerning God is a fixed point, on one side of which lies atheism, and metaphysical and theological blasphemy too often on the other.

Notwithstanding this which has been said, and which appears to be of the utmost evidence, philosophers have proceeded, without any regard to it, from the most early ages: and the whole sum of theology has been in every age a confused rhapsody of discordant, fluctuating hypotheses. The science to which they pretended was unattainable. Their doctrines therefore, though dog-

matically taught, and implicitly received in their several schools, were nothing more than arbitrary hypotheses: and hypotheses being so extravagantly prolific, that one often engenders twenty, it is no wonder that the confusion increased, that the more these doctrines were explained the darker they grew, and that the latter Pythagoricians and Platonicians were, if possible, less intelligible than their masters, and all those who had gone before them. I mention these particularly, because they were the great theological doctors of Greece, and the great channels through which all the metaphysical jargon, and all the superstitious opinions of ancient nations, have come down to us, intermingled with some scraps of good sense and of true theism. Plutarch says there was nothing unreasonable, fabulous, nor superstitious in the sacred institutions of the Egyptians, from whose schools we know that Pythagoras and Plato derived their theology. But on the contrary, he says, that all of them had moral and useful causes, and historical and philosophical meanings. But the priest made his court, at the expense of truth, to the priestess, to whom he addressed his treatise concerning Isis and Osiris: and we shall do better to give credit, on this occasion, to Dionysius Halicarnassensis,* who confesses, that although many of the Greek fables showed the operations of nature by allegories, and were composed for consolation under the calamities of life, for taking away perturbations of mind, for removing false opinions, and for other very good and commendable purposes, yet they are to be condemned in general, many as impious, all as pernicious; and he praises Romulus for admitting none of them.

SECTION VII.

It may be worth while to give two instances of the extravagant hypotheses which philosophy and theology conspired to frame, as soon, perhaps, as men began to turn their thoughts to these subjects; for we find ditheism and tritheism established in the most early ages, concerning which we have any anecdotes.

They who believed a self-existing Being, the first intelligent cause of all things, must have believed this Being to be all perfect. But then, as they modelled his government on a human plan, so they conceived his perfections, moral as well as physical, by human ideas; though they did not presume to limit the former by the latter. Thus, God was said to be the first good; but then the general notion, or the abstract idea, as some philosophers

* Ant. Rom. L. 2.

would call it, of this good, was not only taken from human goodness, but was considered too with little or no other relation than to man, that excellent creature, the very image of his Maker, and one half of whom, at least, was divine. A question arose therefore on these hypotheses. How could evil come into a system, of which God was the author, and man the final cause? This question made a further hypothesis necessary. It was "dignus vindice nodus:" and another first God, another coeternal and coequal principle was introduced to solve it, a first cause of all evil, as the other was of all good. The contest between these independent and rival powers began by a struggle, some have said by a battle, when one of them endeavored to reduce matter, which these philosophers held to be a third principle, though not a third God, into an orderly uniform frame and regular motion, and when the other endeavored to maintain disorder, deformity, irregularity, and to spoil, at least, the great design. The same contest was supposed to continue in the government that commenced at the formation of the world, and physical or moral good and evil to be produced, as one or other of these gods prevailed.

Plutarch,* who was a zealous asserter of this doctrine himself, asserted it to have been likewise that of the magians, the Chaldens, the Egyptians, and of every philosopher almost of any note among the Greeks from Pythagoras down to Plato. He represents it as an opinion settled in the minds of men by the authority of legislators and divines, of philosophers and poets, and not only as an opinion, but as an article of faith, on which sacrifices and religious rites were established. But every man has some favorite folly, and this was his. Bayle himself is forced to confess, that the representation is exaggerated. How indeed is it possible to believe that such numbers of reasonable men could concur, from age to age, in so great an absurdity? Some of them might, and it is probable that they did, hold an opinion very near akin to this, and derived from it, but not the same that Plutarch held, and the Marcionites and Manichæans after him. This hypothesis was mitigated by another; and instead of a god unproduced and self-existent, an inferior being produced and dependent, was assumed to be the author of evil. The preceptor of Trajan could not help admitting, most inconsistently with himself, that the two principles were not of equal force, and that the good principle was prevalent: but even further that Zoroaster, and by consequence the magi, called the good principle alone God, and the evil principle a demon. This mitigated hypothesis was adopted by orthodox Christians, as the other was by heretics, and has

* Lib. de Iside et Osiride.

therefore supported itself longer than the other: though the other spread more among Christians, from the third century, and before Manes down to the seventh and even to the ninth, than it had ever spread and prevailed in the pagan world. But whatever success these hypotheses have had, when we consider even that which I have called mitigated, as a pagan dogma, we must say, that althongh it does not imply contradiction so manifestly as the other, yet it implies it as strongly, and is still more injurious to the Supreme Being. It implies it as strongly; for to affirm that there are two self-existent gods, independent and co-equal, who made and govern the world, is not a jot more absurd, than it is to affirm that a God sovereignly good, and at the same time almighty and all-wise, suffers an inferior dependent being to deface his work in any sort, and to make his other creatures both criminal and miserable. It is still more injurious to the Supreme Being; for if we had been to reason with pagan ditheists on their own notions, we might have insisted, that it is no disgrace to a prince to reign according to the constitution of his country jointly with another, as the ephori reigned at Sparta, and the consuls governed at Rome, and that the ill government of his partner reflects no dishonor on him. But that to say of a monarch, in the true sense of the word, who is invested with absolute power, that he suffers one of his subjects to abuse the rest without control, and to draw them into crimes and revolts, for which he punishes them afterwards, is the most injurious accusation that can be brought. That heathen theists of common sense reasoned in this manner we cannot doubt, and that they did so I find a remarkable proof, though a negative one, and brought for another purpose, in the intellectual system. Celsus objected to the Christians that they believed a certain adversary to God, the devil, called in Hebrew, Satan, and that they affirmed impiously that the greatest God was disabled from doing good, or withstood in doing it, by this adversary. Now Celsus, who made this objection to the Christians, would not have made it, I think, if he himself had held the mitigated ditheism we have mentioned, whether he held the other or no.

Let us speak of tritheism, the other instance proposed to show how natural theology was rendered a confused heap of absurd and inconsistent hypotheses, by men who presumed to dogmatise beyond the bounds of human knowledge.

Dr. Cudworth could not well conceive, no more than la Motthe le Vayer, how a trinity of divine hypostates should be first discovered merely by human wit and reason. He would have it believed, therefore, a revelation to the Jews, and a tradition derived from them. But he supports his suggestion ill. That the Samothracians held a certain trinity of gods, which they

called by an Hebrew name Cabbirim, or the mighty gods, and that there are in the books of the Old Testament certain significations of a plurality in the Deity, are allegations so vague and inconclusive that they prove nothing, or might be turned to prove what the learned author would have disliked very much, to prove it ill perhaps, but as well at least as they prove his suggestion. The other proof he brings may be equivocal as well as weak in the manner in which it is expressed. He quotes Proclus for saying that the trinity contained in the Chaldaic oracles was at first a theology of divine tradition, or a revelation, or a divine cabbala, and he quotes the Greek of Proclus, after which he adds, viz. amongst the Hebrews first, and from them afterwards communicated to the Egyptians and other nations. If Proclus now had said all this in terms, or had spoke to the effect of the additional words, which I am unable to determine, not having the book at this time in my power, the proof would have been no better than either of the former. But if the additional words are not of Proclus, but of the doctor, the doctor seeming to quote Proclus, quotes himself, in respect to the point he was concerned to secure, that this divine revelation could be made to no other nation, if it was made, than to the Hebrews.

I proceed now to say that it is not so hard to conceive how human wit and reason might, and why philosophers did, invent the hypothesis of a trinity, without any obligations to the Jews, who from their exode to their return from their seventy years captivity, and from thence till all their books were written or reduced to a canon, borrowed much more than they lent.

The confusion and obscurity of the first philosophy, as it was taught in the antiquity to which we look up in this discourse, was in no part greater than in this of the trinity. They who have pretended to explain it, to improve it, and to build upon it, have only perplexed it the more: some because they were as chimerical as the first inventors, and others because they had some particular purpose to serve. What is unintelligible in Plato, for instance, or in the fragments that we have of Pythagorean doctrines, you will not perceive to grow more intelligible when you have consulted Jamblicus, Porphyry, Plotinus, any of the philosophers of these sects, or any of the Christian fathers, who sanctified a great deal of this heathen lore. Marcilius Ficinus, and the whole crowd of modern translators, commentators, and collectors, will help you as little. Even Cudworth the best of them, leaves you where he found you, and gives you a little else than a nonsensical paraphrase of nonsense. It was not his fault. The good man passed his life in the study of an unmeaning jargon: and as he learned, he taught.

If he had not been fond of giving a divine original to a doc-

trine that became a fundamental article of Christianity, he might have deduced the original of this very human hypothesis, for such it was in the pagan world, from what he had asserted and proved already. He had shown how poets and philosophers promoted polytheism by allegorising corporeal nature. Was it hard then to imagine, that they allegorised incorporeal nature likewise? They deified sensible, why should they not deify intellectual, objects? They increased the number of their gods, by deifying even mixed modes and relations. Why should they not do the same, by making ideal substances of the wisdom and power of God, and of that divine spirit which they imagined to pervade all things? There was no need of inspiration, nor any extraordinary communication, to prompt them to do so: and it would have been matter of wonder if the whole system of nature had not been reduced, as it was, into one body of corrupt theology, by the Egyptians and the other nations of the East, and by the Greeks, who philosophised many centuries together on the same foolish principles.

The habitude of erecting extravagant hypotheses into doctrines of the first philosophy, and of founding natural theology on the most unnatural principles, might seduce men easily into tritheism, without any such apparent reasons for it as they had for ditheism. But if they thought themselves obliged to invent the latter in order to account for the existence of evil, they saw that there was a necessity for inventing the former, in order to give an appearance of consistency to the very best of their theistical systems. They had gods and demigods and demons enough. But none of them could be reputed first causes, or principles, and three such at least were necessary to be found.

When they had imagined a celestial, on the plan of a terrestrial, monarchy, they found place and rank and business for all the imaginary beings that superstition had created: but they confined the monarch, like an eastern prince, to the inmost recesses of his palace, where they supposed him to remain immovable. They acknowledged him, very rationally, to be the source of all intelligence and wisdom and power, as well as the fountain of all existence, and the spring of all life and motion throughout the whole extent of being. But then they imagined, very irrationally, that this unity was such an immovable essence as could not have acted in the formation, and as did not act in the preservation and government, of the world. They raised their notions of the Divine Majesty so high, or, to speak more properly, they refined so metaphysically upon them, for they cannot be ever raised too high, when they are kept within the bound of our real ideas, that they placed the Supreme God not only far out of the sight of human intellect, but even out of the reach, if I may

say so, of that system whereof they confessed him to be the first cause. There were, indeed, according to them, inferior generated gods participant, in some sort, of his wisdom, and delegates in some degree of his power; but this participation and this delegation were not sufficient: and to make such a system as that of the universe, the very wisdom and the very power of the Supreme self-existent Being were necessary. No cause out of the Deity could produce such effects, and all other beings with participated wisdom and delegated power would be but second causes at best, acting indeed, but acted upon, without any adequate efficacy of their own.

We may very well believe, that some such considerations as these determined the most ancient philosophers to assume a trinity of divine hypostases in the Godhead. A second proceeding eternally from the first, and a third proceeding eternally from the second, or from the first and the second. Subsistences, beings not independent like the good and the evil god, but distinct. Subordinate, but subordinate within the Deity, and far above the highest order of generated gods. It is probable that neither Zoroaster, nor the magi, nor Mercury Trismegist, nor the Egyptian divines, were as ingenious to abstract and distinguish and to invent new words, as the Nicæan fathers, or the latter Pythagoricians and Platonicians. They might content themselves with establishing the general difference I have mentioned between these three, and all their other gods. Cudworth says, that they understood by this trinity the Godhead: and I remember to have read somewhere, in Plotinus perhaps, or in some other madman of that stamp, that there are emanations within the Deity as well as emanations that go out of it. The second of these gods, then, was the divine intellect personified, an emanation that did not emane, if you allow the term, out of the Deity. The third was the divine Spirit, another emanation that did not emane neither. Thus the difficulties that embarrassed these great divines, might seem to be taken away; for though the immovable essence of the unity could not move, nor act, nor pervade, and become the soul of the world immediately, yet all this might be done by the second and third persons of the Godhead, who exerted all the energy of the first.

That such an hypothesis was established among the most ancient of the heathen divines cannot be doubted, though their doctrines are come to us in broken scraps very imperfectly, and therefore very darkly. This imperfect and general knowledge is enough, however, to satisfy any reasonable curiosity, and it leaves room enough for great scholars to dispute and wrangle about particulars. Let us leave that part to them, and pursue reflections of another kind.

Some, and I think very few, of the Greek philosophers were rank atheists. Diagoras was one: and, if it be true that Democritus bought and instructed him, he might pass easily from the absurdity of believing that the visible species of things and the ideas we receive from them are gods, to that of believing that there is no God. Theodorus was another: and he was so zealous in his atheism, that he wrote several books to maintain it. Strato was not quite so positive in the denial of any Supreme Being; but he was very positive, that he had no need of assuming any to account for the making of the world. He went through all the parts of it, and pretended to show that all of them were effects of natural causes, of matter and motion. "Naturalibus fieri aut factum esse dicit ponderibus et motibus," says Tully.* Epicurus acknowledged gods, but gods so extremely ridiculous, that he was guilty of something worse than atheism, whilst he affected theism, "invidiæ detestandæ causâ," says the same Tully.

Such philosophers as these imagined a sort of plastic nature working blindly but necessarily, and requiring no superior principle to direct her action. The greatest part of the ancient naturalists thought very differently from these. They established a material, and an efficient, intelligent cause of all the phenomena. Though all of them believed matter eternal, they had various opinions about the material cause. It was to some an assemblage of all the elements massed and confounded and fermenting together, "rudis indigestaque moles." To others it was some one select element; to Thales water, or perhaps a fluid chaos; to Anaximenes air; to Archelaus air condensed into water, the principle of Thales; or rarified into ether, the fiery principle of the Stoics. Their notions of the efficient intelligent cause were not more uniform than these: but as these were different manners of conceiving the same thing, so were the others. The material cause, under every notion of it, was matter still; the efficient cause, under every notion of it, was intelligence still: and all the notions of this kind, which theistical philosophers entertained, were less repugnant, if I am not much deceived, than it is commonly thought. It seems to me, that the differences between them were more apparent than real, and that they arose chiefly from different applications of the same trinitarian hypothesis. On this foundation, much of what has passed for atheism may be explained easily into theism. I could carry instances of my charity a great way up on this occasion, to the Ionic philosophers, Anaximenes and Archelaus for instance, if not to Anaximander: and if Thales, the founder of this school, wants little,

* Acad. Quæs. l. 4.

Anaxagoras, the last but one of his successors, wants no excuse to clear him of atheism.

The hypothesis of a trinity in the godhead was brought from Egypt into Greece by Orpheus, whoever he was, and possibly by others in that remote antiquity. It is not unlikely too, that this doctrine being taught to a half savage people, who were unable to distinguish between gods in the godhead and gods out of it, if in truth that distinction was made so early, increased and confirmed their polytheism. But the true philosophical age having begun much later in that country, when the Greeks, instead of waiting for missionaries from Egypt, went thither themselves in quest of science, this hypothesis could be little known, and less employed before that era; whereas it was much in use afterwards, and we find the traces of it in all that theistical philosophers taught. These traces are obscure and confused. The doctrine itself was so, till Plato appeared like the Pagan Athanasius, defined the mystery, and fixed a profession of faith that lasted till the Christian Athanasius altered it. Thus we may account, in part, for the obscurity and confusion wherein we discover the traces of this doctrine. It was very obscure and confused in the minds of the philosophers themselves. No wonder then if the references to it, and the opinions derived from it, are still more so in the writings of men who have conveyed them down to us in fragments, and who understood the doctrine even less than these philosophers.*

* We shall have no room to be surprised, that the Pagan doctrine of a trinity in the godhead was taught, and has come down to us, so confusedly; if we consider, how confusedly and how darkly the fathers of the three first centuries expressed themselves on the same subject: though the learned bishop Bull would have made, if he could, these primitive fathers all "ad unum" Athanasians, and the doctrine of the Church to have been exactly that of the Nicæan council, long before Athanasius was born, or the council was held. If this doctrine has come down to us with greater precision, than that of the heathen philosophers, and in a uniformity of terms, the reason is obvious. Ancient theists applied their unsettled notions of this kind differently, and according to their different systems of philosophy. They were under no common control, to enforce an uniformity of terms at least: whereas among Christians there was such a control, and men were obliged to use the same form of words, whatever their opinions were. Their leaders indeed disputed much, and each of them formed a party: but when they met in councils, they were obliged sometimes by art or intrigue, and sometimes by the determining influence of imperial authority, to unite in terms, and to create an appearance of uniformity. Thus the Christian doctrine of the Trinity was fixed. Different councils, it is true, made different decisions, and reverend fathers, who had held one opinion in one council, changed it in another; there were therefore several orthodoxies "pro tempore," if I may say so. But that which prevailed last has come down to us: and nothing has been neglected, not even interpolation, to make more ancient fathers hold the language of those who

Tully makes Velleius say, that Thales was the first who inquired into such matters; that he asserted water to be the first principle of things, and God the mind who framed them all out

were more modern; an example of which I will quote from Erasmus.* That learned, exact, and candid divine not only acknowledges in many places, among a multitude of other defects, such as unfairness, uncharitableness, and violence, the inaccuracy of these fathers in their writings; but he complains likewise of the interpolations and alterations, which have been made in them for the purpose I have mentioned. St. Hilary, for instance, who spoke sometimes of the Son of God, as of a God of the same kind, or of the same nature with his Father, which expressions however do not come up to a complete notion of consubstantiality, dared not call the Holy Ghost God, nor ascribe adoration to him; either because he is not called God expressly in Scripture, or because the Saint thought it more necessary to insist on the Godhead of the Son, whose human nature made it more difficult to persuade mankind that he was God; or else, finally, because the claim of the Holy Ghost had not been yet admitted in due form by councils, who erected themselves, as it were, into courts of honor to settle ranks and precedency in heaven. Erasmus thinks that such reasons as these obliged Hilarius to use much caution in his expressions, and therefore, speaking of the Holy Ghost, he had contented himself to say, "promerendus est:" but some orthodox interpolater added, "et adorandus." Many other instances of corrupting the text of this writer there are, and those principally where those liberties ought to have been taken the least, as in his books "De Trinitate," and "De Synodis;" for in them, says Erasmus, he treated very difficult and very dangerous points of divinity, "periculosæ de rebus divinis difficultates."

The same artifice was employed sometimes in favor of opinions reputed heterodox, if we may believe Rufinus, who, in defending Origen against that bully, Jerom, and that idiot, Epiphanius, insists that Origen would not have been exposed to their censure, if his writings had not been interpolated. But this artifice, as well as others, had a much greater, and an entire effect, when it was employed on the side of the orthodox, that is, of the majority, or of those who made themselves pass for the majority. Thus it happened, in the case of the trinity, and in many others, that Christian doctrines have been handed down with an appearance of uniformity, which pagan doctrines could not have.

But farther, if Christian doctrines had come down in the writings of the most ancient fathers, with still less uniformity than they have, such modern fathers as Bishop Bull, would not have found it hard to make them appear entirely uniform. This he has attempted, in the case of the trinity, with great applause from the ecclesiastics of your church, and from those of ours. He owns, for instance, that Origen talks sometimes too freely and sceptically; that Tertullian cared little what he said, provided he contradicted his adversary; and that two eggs are not more alike, than the expressions of this father to the whimsies of Valentinian. He gives us Lactantius for a rhetor ignorant in theology, and St. Jerom for a sophist not to be relied on much. Many of their expressions being gnostical, and Arian, as well as those of other fathers; they were not much in his favor; and yet to save them for other purposes wherein their authority might be necessary, he distinguishes between witnesses of the faith, and interpreters of the Scriptures. He allows them to be good witnesses, and condemns them often as bad interpreters. He makes this distinction particularly, when he speaks of a passage in

* Ep in Hilarium.

of water.* Diogenes Laertius says, that Thales held God to be the oldest of all the things that exist, because ungenerated or

Irenæus, where this father cites a passage from the prophet Isaiah, to prove the divinity of the Holy Ghost. Bull thought Origen orthodox in his opinion, though not in his expressions, concerning the trinity. Few of the fathers, who lived before the Nicæan council, were so; and therefore Bull supposes them orthodox against their expressions, rather than proves them to have been so, by their expressions. He does by them, what they did by the Scriptures, and draws them to his sense, in what terms soever they signify their own. Cudworth thinks these primitive fathers heterodox in opinion, as well as in expression. They must needs have been much in the wrong, since they agreed in asserting the subordination of the son to the father. They had taken this opinion of the logos from the Platonic philosophy, and their whole trinity was built on the plan which Plato had made less confused than that of other heathen trinitarians. "Usque ad tres hypostases, dicit Plato, Dei progredi essentiam; et esse quidem, dicit, Deum summe bonum, post illum autem secundum conditorem, tertium autem mundi animam."

The absurdities and profanations built on such notions as these, were innumerable. He who endeavors to consider them with attention, will find his head turn in the confusion they create, and no precise discrimination of orthodox and heterodox possible to be made between them, either according to reason, wherein they have no foundation at all, or to gospel revelation, wherein they have very little. They were however propagated by pagan and Christian theology, till metaphorical generations were thought to be real, and till the virtues and operations of the one Supreme Being, were assumed to be distinct hypostases or subsistences in the divinity; as the æons of Valentinian signified, I presume, no more, in the allegorical cant of the first Christian times, than virtues and affections of the divinity, which were afterwards understood to be real beings existing out of the first Being.

These doctrines were encouraged, perhaps introduced by others, that traditional theology among the heathens, and cabalistical literature among the Jews, had preserved from the most ancient ages; and which as wild as they were, had wanted neither knaves nor fools to vouch for them. These were such as supposed frequent manifestations of the Supreme Being to his creatures. According to these he manifested himself sometimes under the form of an angel; sometimes a little, and but a little differently, under that of a man; both of which were called God whilst the manifestation lasted. That this was so, we may conclude from divers passages of the Old Testament, and from several Egyptian traditions. Thus it became in time not hard to imagine a much more noble manifestation of the Supreme Being himself, in the appearance of the Logos or the Word, under a human form, into which God had insinuated himself, and in which he remained incarnated. "Pater in me manens facit ipse opera." The Word, that is the supreme reason, was always with God, for God alone is that supreme reason: but this reason spoke to mankind under the sensible image of a man, when that person appeared who was called the Son of God on account of his miraculous birth, and most important mission. Such was the Word of St. John; "the visible image of the invisible God." To this let us add, for the honor of humanity, and on the authority of Scripture, that angels suffered themselves to be adored by men before this manifestation; but that they have declined this honor ever since the Son of God took upon him the human nature.

* Thales, qui primus de talibus rebus quæsivit, aquam dixit esse initium rerum: Deum autem eam mentem, quæ ex aquâ cuncta fingeret.—Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. i.

unproduced; and the world to be most beautiful, because it was made by God.* These expressions might induce one to think, that Thales was not only the oldest, but the most orthodox, of the Greek philosophers, even more so than the divine Plato; and that his doctrine may serve as an instance to confirm Tertullian's maxim, how precarious soever it be, "id verum quod primum." They might induce one to think, that Thales intended the Supreme Being, whose sole action in the production of things other theists did not acknowledge; though they acknowledged his existence. But these passages compared with others, will rather serve to show, in how confused a manner the trinitarian hypothesis led these philosophers to speak of God, and of the first efficient cause. Bayle thought the text of Tully corrupted in the passage concerning Thales, because Velleius having said, that this philosopher was the first, says immediately after, that Anaxagoras† was the first, who taught this doctrine. There may be room for such a suspicion, and whatever interpretation be given to the passage, it will be little agreeable to the usual clearness and precision of that great author.

When we consider that Thales had been instructed in the Egyptian schools, and reflect on the opinion imputed to him by Stobæus, that the first cause had no action, we must be persuaded, that however he spoke of mind, he did not intend the first God in the heathen trinity. He seems rather to have confounded Nous and Psyche, mind and soul, the second and the third god. A passage in Diogenes Laertius is very favorable to this notion; for in that Thales is said to have held, that mind, and therefore the efficient cause which had made all things out of water, was the swiftest of things, and pervaded rapidly the universe.‡ None of these philosophers presumed to employ the first God, as the immediate active efficient cause of things. They introduced therefore into their physiological theology the second and the third gods of the Zoroastrian and Orphic trinity, whom they sometimes seem to distinguish, and whom they much oftener confound.

Pythagoras talked, it is said, of an immaterial unity and a material duality, by which he pretended to signify perhaps the first principles of all things, the efficient and material causes; and yet we see how his doctrine is represented in the first book of the nature of the gods. He was understood to have taught,

* Antiquissimum eorum omnium quæ sunt, Deus; ingenitus enim. Pulcherrimum mundus; à Deo enim factus est.

† Anaxagoras, qui accepit ab Anaximene disciplinam, primus omnium rerum descriptionem et modum mentis infinitæ vi ac ratione designari, et confici voluit.

‡ Velocissimum, mens; nam per universa discurrit.

that God is a soul diffused through all being, and from which all human souls were taken.* This was called "avulsionem ætheris immortalis et divini:" and Cicero remarks, or makes his interlocutor remark, that Pythagoras did not see how by this avulsion or distraction, God himself was rent and torn, "discerpi ac dilacerari Deum."†

This Pythagorean god was very like the etherial god of the Stoicians, and both of them signified, if my notions are right on this subject, which I do not presume to affirm, though I think them as probable as any others, the third divinity in the godhead, according to the trinitarian hypothesis, which was certainly known to the Samian, and could not be unknown to the master of the Portic. These theistical naturalists imagined a sort of plastic nature, as well as the atheistical naturalists; but instead of such a one as acted blindly and necessarily, they assumed one that acted by design and choice, that is with intelligence. This mind or intelligent spirit, for they were often undistinguished, being infused, as it were, into all the parts of the material world, and moving and directing the whole as the human mind or soul moves and directs the human body, they conceived, the Stoics at least conceived, the material world like a great animal endued with life, sense and intellect, according to the curious logic of Zeno, who advanced this paradox on the strength of logic for want of any better foundation, and just as he advanced many, and might have advanced ten thousand more. But still we must not imagine, that air or water, or ether, or fire, or the world itself was God in the opinion of these philosophers. No, they were theists, and their god was the divine spirit that exerted the power and energy of the father of spirits. Their god was the mind or soul of their trinity, or both together. They who looked up to the "sublime candens" of Ennius, invoked Jupiter, according to this poet; and who was Jupiter? not the æther, the "sublime candens," but a being every where present and almighty, the father of gods and men, the lord of all things, and who governs them with his nod.‡

As extravagant as these doctrines may appear, you must not condemn them too rashly. If Zeno lived in these days, he might justify what he taught about ether, and a divine spirit that acts in it and by it, by greater authorities than you apprehend perhaps. He might soon reconcile his opinions to those of some

* Pythagoras——censuit animum esse per naturam rerum omnem intentum et commeantem, ex quo animi nostri carperentur, &c.

† Diog. Laer.

‡ Aspice hoc sublime candens, quem invocant omnes Jovem—patrem divumque hominumque—dominatorem rerum, omnia nutu regentem—præsentem ac præpotentem Deum.—Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

Christian philosophers, and shelter himself behind their orthodoxy. There are those who ascribe as much to this active, luminous, fiery ether as Zeno did: and since he thought it, or rather called it, God, because of the divine spirit whose vehicle it was, they would soon persuade him to admit that this divine is an incorporeal spirit, without whose immediate action upon ether, even ether itself would be incapable of producing any one of the phenomena, and not the least operation could be performed in the whole extent of physical nature. They would persuade him to it the sooner, because by rejecting all existence, besides spirit and idea, and by making his doctrines coincide with theirs in the whole, he would deliver himself from a most absurd inconsistency, or from the trouble of defending it. I find, in one of the finest letters of Seneca,* whose authority concerning the tenets of Zeno, the founder of the sect he had embraced, is decisive, that this philosopher denied the existence of a material world, and by consequence, one would think, of his favorite ether. Parmenides asserted one sole substance, like Spinoza. Zeno denied even this, says Seneca.† He could not believe his God, therefore, to be so much as clothed with ether, unless he contradicted himself; but by taking refuge among these philosophers, he might talk as if he did; he might maintain that he was so clothed, and might assume the right they assume, to talk most learnedly of all the corporeal phenomena without believing that they exist; in short, he might reduce inconsistency itself into system. Seneca, and the whole Portic, might cry out that too much subtilty does great hurt and is injurious to truth.‡ They would cry out in vain.

Having observed how Thales, Pythagoras, and Zeno founders of three famous sects reasoned about the first principles of things, I come to speak of Anaxagoras. Now this philosopher, like the rest, held matter to be eternal. But he differed from them in his notions concerning the efficient cause. He did not make a plastic intelligent nature of mind and spirit, confounded into one.

He did not make the same of spirit alone, as he might have done, since this spirit being divine and even a third God, according to ancient traditions, could want no intelligence. He did not mingle up both or either of these with matter, to constitute a soul of the world. He advanced a much more rational hypothesis than any of those who went before, or who came after him. Diogenes Laertius has preserved the summary of it in his own words. He was the first, says this biographer, who added

* Ep. 88.

† ——Parmenidi, nihil est præter unum—Zenoni ne unum quidem.

‡ Quantum mali faciat nimia subtilitas, et quàm infesta veritati sit. Ib.

mind to matter, that is, he added it in a manner that neither Thales nor any of the Greek philosophers had imagined before him; for he writes thus in the beginning of his work—all things were blended together, when mind came and put them into order.* "Accessit mens." Mind then was no part of them, no plastic nature working in them. Mind, the first efficient cause, was distinct from them, and extrinsical to them. I determine not, whether Anaxagoras meant by mind the Supreme Being in his unity, without any regard to the hypothesis of a trinity, or whether he assumed distinctly the second God of this trinity, whilst others assumed the third only, or confounded the second with the third in their notions of a first efficient cause. In all cases he was a more reasonable theist, and especially if he ascribed the production, order, and government of the universe to the one, whom others considered only as the first God; which I incline to think was his meaning.

But to what purpose do I comment on this passage, when the doctrine of Anaxagoras concerning a first efficient cause is so fully mentioned by Aristotle and Plutarch? The former of these was much more inclined to censure, than to approve the opinions of other philosophers: and yet Anaxagoras extorted his approbation, on this occasion at least, how much soever their opinions might differ on others. He who taught that mind or intellect was the efficient cause of the world, and of all order in it, appeared like a man of good sense, "*quasi sobrius*," in comparison with the former naturalists, who were a set of vain babblers, "*vana dicentes*," says Aristotle:† and he adds, we know that this man was Anaxagoras. The same philosopher, in another place,‡ lets us farther into this doctrine; for he says there, that according to it this mind, the first principle or efficient cause, was simple and unmixed, and that Anaxagoras ascribed to it both knowledge and the beginning of motion.§ Plutarch goes farther,‖ for he contrasts the doctrine of Anaxagoras, who held that matter was motionless till God gave it motion as well as order, with that of Plato, who held that matter was in a disorderly motion, and that God did nothing more than direct this motion so as to bring order out of confusion. This is the substance of the passage: and surely the Ionic philosopher came nearer to

* Primus hic materiæ mentem adjecit, in principio operis—sic scribens, omnia simul erant, deinde accessit mens eaque composuit.

† Arist. Metaph. l. i.

‡ Arist. De Anima, l. i.

§ ——Simplicem, et non mistam, et puram esse, sinceramque dixit. Atque eidem principio hæc utraque tribuit, cognitionem—et motum, dicens, universum mentem movisse.

‖ Plut. De Placit. Phil. l. i, c. 7.

orthodoxy in this case than the divine Plato, though such a Platonic madman as poor Dacier may not scruple to assert, and to believe piously, that, according to Plato, motion was imprinted on matter by the same spirit who created matter.*

It was objected to Anaxagoras, by Aristotle and by several Christian writers, that although he acknowledged a supreme mind to be the efficient cause of all things, yet he had never recourse to it when he could account for the phenomena without it. That he used the divine intellect as a machine, to remove difficulties, otherwise insuperable, out of the way;† but in every other case, he chose rather to insist on natural causes,‡ than to argue from the principles of§ mind and reason. All this now means no more, than that he neither mingled logic, like Aristotle, nor theology, like Plato, with his physics: and the objection is not only absurd in itself, but so much the more so, because the methods of inquiring into nature, implied in it and opposed to that of Anaxagoras, are infinitely absurd. I acknowledge, might Anaxagoras say, a supreme mind that disposed and ordered the whole frame of the universe, that gave it motion and set the great machine a going under the influence and direction of second causes, which proceed and work effects according to the original impressions that divine wisdom and power made uniformly on all matter, or differently on the different elements of it. These original impressions, which proceed from the inconceivable energy of the first efficient cause, and this order of second causes which proceeds from them, I call laws of nature. Knowledge of the first is wholly unattainable. I presume therefore to speak seldom of it, and always hypothetically. Knowledge of the second may be attained in some degree by observation and experiment, and by no other means. By these we may rise a little way from particular to general and more general causes, and within these bounds I confine my physical researches.

If Anaxagoras held this discourse, whatever cavils might be made by atomic or other philosophers to some of the terms he employed, we should be obliged to confess that he talked very rationally. Logic came into mode after his time. But logic, to speak like my Lord Bacon, cannot reach the subtilty of nature, and by catching at what it cannot hold, serves rather to establish and fix error, than to open the way to truth. I may say too, after men of the greatest name in philosophy, what it would

* Il a été imprimé a la matiere par le même esprit qui l'a creé.—La doctrine de Claton.

† —— Tanquam machinâ utitur intellectu, &c.—Arist.

‡ —— Magis cætera omnia, quam intellectum, causam eorum quæ fiunt ponit.—Arist.

§ —— Ex mentis rationisque regula.—Euseb.

become me ill to pronounce on my own authority, that Aristotle rendered himself as ridiculous by applying logic to natural philosophy, as Des Cartes rendered himself estimable by the application of geometry to it. As to theology, they who abuse it by mixing it with physics, any further than Anaxagoras did, degrade the Supreme Being in their ideas, and lead men back towards polytheism, or to something very like it at least. Which is the less pardonable, because it is done wantonly, as it were, and without any apparent motive but impertinent curiosity, or as impertinent vanity. They are unable to conceive how body can act at all, and therefore they suppose the immediate presence and action of an incorporeal agent in every operation of corporeal nature. But to what purpose? Ether, it is said, that pure invisible active fire, permeates the hardest bodies, or gravitation or attraction intercedes all body, even the "minima naturæ." Is not this now to ascend high enough in the series of second causes? Or if we cannot conceive how ether performs of itself, and without any concurrent cause, the operations, and produces the effects which chemists ascribe to it, do we hope to discover how mind acts on ether, or concurrently with it? Will any man, who is in his senses, expect to discover what those original impressions are, or how they were given by the supreme mind, which determine ether in this manner, and make it the sensible cause of these effects? I think not. They who believe that the Newtonian attraction is no original nor universal property of matter, will do extremely well to attempt the improvement of this system, by discovering the physical or metaphysical cause of it. They who believe it such a property will inquire no farther, nor agitate their minds, nor beat their brains, to discover the cause, and in hope to determine how this property was impressed originally on matter. A Leibnitzian, who does not believe any such original universal property, nor any thing more than a new phenomenon to have been discovered, should consequentially attempt the improvement I have just mentioned. But I think he would rather attempt to demolish by logic, what has been erected on experiment, and geometry, without being able to substitute any thing so good in the room of it. He would require of the Newtonian, to give him the sufficient reason of such a property in matter. He would retire from the visible corporeal world to the intellectual world of ideas, and endeavor to make the inquiry, that he could carry on no farther in physics, and in metaphysics. The Newtonian, if he was wise, would refuse to follow him, lest the inquiry should end, after much labor of abstract meditation, as oddly as that of Leibnitz did, when he could find the sufficient reason of extension in nothing better than non-extended substances, in those simple beings his monades.

As it is unreasonable to indulge the foolish desire of knowing, or the impertinent desire of appearing to know, beyond the reach and comprehension of our very limited faculties in all cases, so it is particularly both profane and injurious to true theism to assume the immediate presence and action of the Supreme Being in all the operations of corporeal nature; however the assumption may be palliated by metaphysical distinctions, and how innocent soever the intentions of those who make it may be. They who do this, do in effect reduce God in their ideas, notwithstanding all the magnificent expressions which they employ, to be a sort of plastic intelligent nature, working constantly on matter, if not in it. The notion is much the same with that which the pagans entertained. It is only less reverential to the Supreme Being than theirs was. They gave this employment to a third God, who was in that hypothesis the second link in that chain of being that reached down from God to man. These Christian philosophers and divines give it to the Supreme Being himself; for they profess that they adore this Being in his unity, and have no other God but him. We are forced to help our conceptions of the divine nature by images taken from human nature, and the imperfections of this nature are our excuse. But then we must take care not to make humanity the measure of divinity, and much more not to make the last the least of the two. When we have raised our idea of any human excellency as high as we are able, it remains a very limited idea. When we apply it to God, we must add to it therefore our negative idea, or our notion of infinity; that is, we must not confine it by the same, nor suppose it confined by any limitations whatever. Thus when we speak of the world the work of God, we must not conceive it to have been made by laborious progression, and to have remained at last imperfect like the works of men. We must conceive, on the contrary, as well as we can, that God willed it to exist, and it existed; that he wills it to continue, and it continues distinct from the workman, like any human work, and infinitely better fitted by the contrivance and disposition of it to answer all the purposes of the divine architect, without his immediate and continual interposition. To think otherwise is to measure divinity by a more scanty measure than humanity, and, because we cannot conceive how the operations of this vast machine are performed, to account for them by supposing it, in this instance, less perfect than a machine of human execution. Carry a clock to the wild inhabitants of the cape of Good Hope. They will soon be convinced that intelligence made it, and none but the most stupid will imagine that this intelligence is in the hand that they see move, and in the wheels that they see turn. Those among them, who pretend to greater sagacity than the rest,

may perhaps suspect that the workman is concealed in the clock, and there conducts invisibly all the motions of it. The first of these Hottentot philosophers are, you see, more rational than atheists; the second are more so than the heathen naturalists, and the third are just at a pitch with some modern metaphysicians.

The same objection was pushed by Plato against Anaxagoras on this farther consideration, that, by insisting on second causes alone, he neglected the contemplation of final causes, and to "penetrate the designs of that Supreme Spirit who governs the world; whilst Socrates undertook to explain all nature by the fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, and rather to give men great views, and to elevate their minds, than to instruct them in natural philosophy."* I have touched this subject, I believe, already in part, and enough to show, after my Lord Bacon, that the method Anaxagoras took, and our modern philosophers have pursued with so much honor to themselves, and so much benefit to mankind, tended to the advancement of real knowledge; whereas the contrary method tended to obstruct, and did really obstruct it. But in this place, and without repeating what has been said before, I must examine the objection in another view, and show by a comparison of the two methods, that Socrates and Plato, who were in all things the same, as Plutarch says,† substituted fantastic in lieu of real knowledge, and corrupted science to the very source; that of the first philosophy in a particular manner, and by such assumptions, and such a method of reasoning as continue the taint to this day.

They discovered a first intelligent cause, as Anaxagoras had done, *à posteriori*, that is, by the only true way by which we are able to make this discovery. The reflections which Socrates made on the creatures, as we learn from Xenophon,‡ demonstrated to him that the Creator of the world was not chance. It might have been expected from the character of Socrates, that he would have confined his speculations to the same principle of reasoning, or have controlled them by it. But he did the contrary. Xenophon who took minutes of his discourses, accused Plato of corrupting the doctrine of their common master, and Diogenes Laertius says, that Plato ascribed to him many things which he never taught. This writer quotes for it even the authority of Socrates himself: for he relates, that when this philosopher heard the Lysis read, he cried out, "Oh Hercules! how many things does this young man feign of me?" But notwithstanding these testimonies, and without entering into the quarrel

* Dacier on the doctrine of Plato.
† De Placit. Phil.
‡ De Memorab.

between Xenophon and Plato, like Gellius, Athenæus, and others, it would be easy to prove by several authorities, and even by that of Xenophon, that if Socrates did not say all that Plato made him say, yet he advanced many points of doctrine much more improper to be subjects of inquiry, than many which he forbade to be made such. In short, though he is said to have drawn philosophy from the clouds, and though he did in fact prefer the study of morality to that of physics, yet he mounted to the clouds himself, and lost himself in them. How could he do otherwise? when he declared that the two offices of philosophy are the contemplation of God, and the abstraction of the soul from corporeal sense.* Men, who are presumptuous and mad enough to think themselves capable of such contemplation and such abstraction, may well begin their inquiries out of the bounds of human knowledge: and they who do so, run a great risk of getting never into them. Such were these famous philosophers: and that you may the better comprehend their method, I choose to set it before you in the light in which it stands in the Phædo. You will see it there, and perhaps it is the only thing worth observing in the whole dialogue, with this advantage, that the method of reasoning *à priori* is contrasted with that of reasoning *à posteriori*.

In the account which Phædo gives of the discourse Socrates held immediately before his death, concerning the immortality of the soul, two objections that were made to him are mentioned. It was objected that the soul, being nothing more than a kind of harmony resulting from the composition of the body, instead of lasting longer than the body, must decay with it, and even perish before it. In the next place, the soul having been compared to a tailor, who makes himself several suits of clothes, and wears them out one after another, the objector urges, that she may wear out herself at last by the fatigue of going through so many generations, and perish with one body, though she has outlived many. Such weighty objections threw the auditors, who had been convinced before by the no less weighty arguments of Socrates, into doubt and perplexity. Socrates felt none, as you will believe, of course: and Phædo proceeds to relate how he continued the disputation, how he convinced Cebes one of the objectors, and how he left Simonias the other without a reply. In order to do this the more effectually, he thinks it necessary to consider the causes of generation and corruption: and he says on that occasion, that he had been desirous in his youth to study physics, or the history of nature, as he calls this science. Now the more he studied nature, that he might discover the cause of

* Stanley, from Plato.

generation and corruption, and the constitution of human bodies, the more blind and the more ignorant, it seems, he grew: and this we shall believe the more easily still, if we consider how superficially his scholar talks, and how grossly he blunders too, whenever he touches these subjects, which he affects to treat as matters of amusement rather than of serious application. Socrates became acquainted with second causes and effects in the course of this study; but he could go no higher, and he remained much dissatisfied with such imperfect knowledge. He was therefore extremely rejoiced when he fell by accident on the works of Anaxagoras; for that philosopher teaching that mind or intelligence had disposed and ordered and was the cause of all things, he expected to find in those writings the sufficient reason of Leibnitz, not only how but why this mind or intelligence had disposed and ordered every thing, why every thing is as it is through the whole extent of nature. But he was again wonderfully disappointed. Anaxagoras proceeded on observation and experiment, such as he was able to make, to consider how second causes work in the corporeal system, and the production of the phenomena, under the direction, and by the energy of the first. But he presumed not to go up to the first, to discover how this direction was given, how this energy was communicated, nor, in a word, what the designs, the reasons, and the ends of the divine Architect were. Socrates, therefore, who aimed at nothing less than knowledge of this kind, despised Anaxagoras, and considering what he had a mind to know, without any regard to the means he had of knowing, he despised physics and resorted to metaphysics. There he and his scholar found the immaterial forms of things, eternal ideas and incorporeal substances; by which if you should ask me what I understand him to have meant, I should be obliged in conscience to answer you as honest Cebes answered Socrates, "per Jovem haud multum." Whatever they are, they exist in the divine intellect. There we may, and there we ought to contemplate them; for the Logos or second God in the Platonic trinity was an assemblage, a congeries, as Cudworth calls him, of beings crowded into one, the place of ideas in the Platonism of Malebranche, and the same thing to the soul, as the soul is to the body; for so we must understand an expositor and translator of Plato, or deny him any meaning at all.*

If you would know how Socrates pursues his sublime metaphysical method of investigating nature, you may please to imagine Anaxagoras and him in your garden, and yourself sauntering between them. You admire the beauty and smell of one

* Dacier Arg. du Phædon.

of your flowers, and you ask the philosophers what makes it so fine and so sweet? The first talks to you of the figure of the flower, of the variety of colors which set off one another, and the several tints which run into one another and beget a pleasing confusion. He talks to you of the different strainers through which the sap is filtered, and of the great alterations that he has observed to be wrought to the taste as well as to the sight and smell in fruits as well as flowers by this operation of nature.—But he owns very frankly, that his knowledge extends no further, and that he cannot so much as guess at the inward constitutions, and the real essences of substances. Socrates asks Anaxagoras whether his senses do not deceive him, when they give him ideas that are not full nor true representations of the outward objects? Whether he does not perceive, that sensible objects are always in a flux, and never exist; whereas intellectual objects are permanent, and exist always! Whether he can pretend therefore to have any thing more than opinion about the former, and whether the latter alone are not objects of knowledge?—Whether the intellectual contemplation of these is not disturbed by the impressions of the other, and whether we are not kept from knowledge by taking opinion for it? Such questions as these, and many more, we may suppose, that Socrates would ask according to his usual style, in reply to the Ionic philosopher; after which he would bid you shut your eyes and stop your nose, if you are curious to know why the flower is fine and sweet. He would bid you raise your thoughts by intense meditation, and an abstraction from all particulars, up to the immaterial forms, the first fine and the first sweet. It is by them, he would say, that this flower becomes fine and sweet, just as a thing is big by bigness, or little by littleness, just as one is one by the participation of unity, and two are two by the participation of duality.

If, in the course of your conversation, it should turn on moral subjects, the same method of reasoning would be applied even to them. Should you ask Anaxagoras what goodness is, or justice? He might bid you perhaps turn your eyes inward first, then survey mankind, observe the wants of individuals, the benefits of society, and from these particulars frame the general notions of goodness and justice. He might go a step further, and add, this is human goodness and human justice, such as we can comprehend, such as we can exercise, and such as the supreme mind has made it both our duty and our interest to exercise, by the constitution of the human system, and by the relations which arise in it; from all which our notions of goodness and justice result, and are compounded. Of divine goodness and divine justice, might this philosopher conclude, I am unable to frame any

adequate notions, and instead of conceiving such distinct moral attributes in the Supreme Being, we ought perhaps to conceive nothing more than this, that there are various applications of one eternal reason, which it becomes us little to analyse into attributes.

The language of Socrates would be very opposite to this. He would bid you turn your eyes from the moral, as well as the physical world to the intellectual, nor aim at knowledge where it is not to be had, but seek it where it is alone to be had. He would bid you disengage your soul from the incumberment of your body by purification and intense meditation, rise from sense to pure intellect, and, despising the low drudgery that the acquisition of particular opinions requires, aspire to nothing less than general knowledge, a knowledge of the immaterial forms of things, which are antecedent to actual existence, a knowledge which may be obtained in part now, and which will be complete hereafter. He would proceed and insist, for this is the express doctrine of the Phædo, that when you have once mounted up to these eternal, independent, and unalterable ideas, you should make them the foundations or first principles of all your reasoning, and receive as true, or reject as false, whatever you observe to be agreeable, or repugnant to them. Thus you would become able to imitate God in the exercise of goodness, justice, and every other moral virtue; since his and your ideas of these virtues would be taken from the same originals: and Socrates might the better conjure you, as he conjured his auditors in the prison, to make yourself as like as possible to your great exemplar, the Supreme Being.

I think you are not extremely conversant in the works of Plato: and you may suspect therefore that I aggravate the impertinence of his doctrines. But the truth is, that as I have made Anaxagoras say nothing more than what he would, or might have said, conformably to his manner of philosophising; so I have made Socrates advance nothing which the Phædo in particular, as well as Plato's writings in general, will not vouch. But since I have brought this rambling essay down to the founder of the Academy, it is necessary that something more should be said about him and his philosophy; for his appearance, and the institution of his school make a most remarkable epocha in the history of the first philosophy. So remarkable, and so necessary to be well surveyed, that we cannot otherwise discern the true origin of the first philosophy, and the theology which prevails at this hour in our own country, and among all the nations of the West.

SECTION VIII.

Signs, symbols, sacerdotal letters, sacred dialects, and hieroglyphics were employed by the Egyptian and eastern nations, to preserve and to perpetuate their knowledge. Strange means indeed! For how imperfectly, how darkly, how uncertainly must this knowledge have been conveyed both to and from the Greek philosophers? What precision or clearness can we imagine, for instance, that Democritus could find in those ethics which he is said to have transcribed from the columns of Acicarus in Babylonia? These monuments of Egyptian and eastern philosophy were explained, it may be said, to Democritus and to the other Greeks, who went into those countries for instruction in every part of science, by the Brachmans, the magi, the gymnosophists, and the Egyptian priests, into whose colleges they were admitted, and into whose rites they were initiated. I believe that this was so. I believe that the Egyptian and eastern masters explained and commented the hieroglyphical or sacerdotal text to their Grecian scholars, and I believe further, that the scholars set up for masters soon. The philosophy they had learned, marvellous and mystic, suited their genius extremely, and was particularly adapted to their humor, in ages when every man who had pretensions of this kind affected to institute a new sect, or to distinguish himself at least by some new hypothesis. But what was the effect of all this. Did they become more intelligible than their masters, or was their knowledge more real? We have in our hands the book Jamblicus wrote in answer to the questions which Porphyry had asked. Jamblicus wrote long after the times we speak of here; but his sum of theology and theurgic knowledge was extracted from Assyrian and Chaldean memorials, from the columns of the first Mercury, and from books that contained all the doctrines of the ancients, concerning matters of a divine nature, which were probably the books of the second Mercury, or such as went under his name. In short, from the same sources, from whence the Greeks had so many centuries before derived their knowledge real and pretended. Was it grown more clear? Was it not in Jamblicus, and in all the Greek philosophers, who mingled up their own conceits with those of their Egyptian and eastern masters, as unintelligible in jargon, as the original of it all could be in hieroglyphics or sacerdotal letters.

Such we may conclude was the first philosophy among the Greeks, from the beginning of their philosophical era, which we date no higher than Pherecydes of Syros and Thales, dark

in its original, and rendered more dark and more confused by men who grafted incessantly one degree of fantastical knowledge on another, and who for want of any criterion to fix their opinions wandered in every hypothesis which their warm imaginations, overheated by those of Egypt and the East, could suggest to them.

In the midst of this darkness and confusion Plato arose, about two centuries after the commencement that has been set of the philosophical era. If he dispelled any of this darkness, it was by introducing a false light into the first philosophy, that led men oftener out of the way of truth than into it: and as the confusion, which vague notions and systems of mere imagination necessarily produce, there was never any greater than that which arose in metaphysics and theology, after Platonism began to be dogmatically taught in the school of Alexandria, and in those of Christianity.

This philosopher availed himself of all the fantastical science that was then in vogue. He went into Egypt, he heard Cratylus, a scholar of Heraclitus. He had a philosophical correspondence with Archytas: and, that he might improve himself the more in Pythagorean doctrines, he went into Italy and conversed with the principal men of that broken sect. He was a follower and a scholar of Socrates from his youth. Neither Socrates nor he had any great claim to the honor of being first inventors or teachers in any part of science. That the master reduced speculation to action we cannot doubt: and Tully in his Academical Questions describes him pompously as the first who called philosophy off from objects which are placed by nature beyond our reach, and which had employed all the philosophers before him, to the business and duty of common life, and to the consideration of virtue and vice, of good and evil. But public and private morality, and all the rules of good government, to say it by the way, had been taught long before Socrates, by Solon and the other sages of Greece: and if we compare the success of his mission at Athens with that of Pythagoras at Crotona, as it is represented by Justin,* we shall find no reason to think him either the first or the greatest missionary of natural religion. Sure it is, that he devoted himself to this work with much sincerity, perseverance and zeal, and was the martyr of a much purer doctrine than many a modern missionary has died for teaching. All we are to understand, therefore, by what is mentioned above, seems to be this, that he confined his lessons of philosophy to ethics: and even this cannot be true, if his lessons were such as Plato represents them. I cannot help thinking that Tully was more at-

tached to Socrates on account of his academical, than his moral character.

There was a greater simplicity, no doubt, in his manner of teaching than in that of Plato, and in the doctrines too, very probably, that he taught. When questions were asked him about another world, he answered with much simplicity, that he had never been there, nor had ever seen any one who came from thence. Plato pretended to know more of the matter, and to have his knowledge from one who had been there, and whom the infernal judges had sent to reveal what he had seen and heard. This idle tale was taken probably from the magi or the Chaldeans, if this Erus Armenius, mentioned in the tenth book of his Politics, was one of the Zoroasters: and as idle as it is, it got into history,* and has been recorded gravely, among other stories of extraordinary events. But though the doctrines, as well as the manners of Socrates, were more simple than those of Plato; yet we know from Plutarch, and even by the discourses which Xenophon as well as Plato ascribes to him, that he entertained and propagated many of those theological and metaphysical notions, which are not, most certainly, parts of natural theology; because they cannot be necessarily deduced from any knowledge that we have of nature.

Metaphysics may be said to have succeeded mythology and physics in Greece about this time, though the name was not invented till long after. Pheregydes, Pythagoras, and Parmenides made strong pretensions to a science of this sort. But the first and the last founded no sect; and that of the other was soon dispersed and extinguished: though Diogenes Laertius says, by mistake doubtless, that it continued eighteen generations. The writings of these philosophers being soon lost, nor any set of men remaining long to preserve a body of their doctrines, Plato and Aristotle had an opportuuity of decking themselves in their plumes, and of coming down to posterity as originals on this and other subjects, on which they were far from being such.

The fables and the superstitious notions that prevailed among the vulgar of all ranks, in the days of polytheism, about their gods, became soon too gross to satisfy those who began in every country to emerge out of ignorance, and to cultivate and improve their reason. In vain did the philosophers and priests endeavor to soften them to such men as these, by all the mystery of their mysteries, into which Socrates would never submit to be initiated, that is, by their secret doctrine. Not only the unity of the Supreme Being, but the absurdity of supposing him to exist a system of matter like other material beings, was discovered, and the

* Val. Max. l. i. Macrob. somn. Scrip.

notion of a spiritual substance was established. Whether this notion was entertained first of the Supreme Being, and was applied afterwards to the human soul; whether it was entertained first of the human soul, and was applied afterwards to the Supreme Being; or whether the idea of spirit and spiritual substance was determined exactly either by ancient philosophers, or by Christian fathers, as we have determined ours, if even ours is as much determined as we suppose it to be, I shall not inquire at this time. All I mean to observe is, that an intellectual world of subordinate and of created gods, of demons, of souls, and other spiritual inhabitants, being once assumed, as it was together with the unity of God, if that which is demonstrated may be said in any sense or on any occasion to be assumed, the philosophers did much the same thing in a metaphysical, as they and the priests had done in a mythological way. They made as many spiritual beings as they wanted, and they generated them as they could. The head of Jupiter opened, and Pallas the goddess of wisdom came out of it, according to the mythologists. This image was too gross, and the fable too impertinent to be retained. Plato therefore refined metaphysically upon it, and supposed, for in him it was mere supposition, a second god, the logos, the word, the wisdom of the first, an emanation proceeding from the first. When this metaphysical generation by emanation was once established in opinion, metaphysics peopled heaven as fast as ever physics, by the help of mythology, had done: and it is impossible to consider without astonishment, how these spiritual beings were multiplied from age to age, by Pythagorician and Platonic philosophers, by Jewish cabbalists, and by Christian divines both orthodox and heretical. A new jargon grew up to express these chimerical notions, and very often to express things of which the learned in those days, as in ours, had not themselves any notion at all. Expansions and diffusions of the most excellent nature, which Pythagoras had learned from the Zoroastrian theology to be pure and perfect light, and which some of the Greek philosophers called an intelligent fire, processions, profusions, and extensions of the first simple substance, superior lights in the world of emanations, called sephiroth by the Jews, æons male and female, supersubstantial and substantial beings, numbers, ideas, words, forms, souls that inhabit in heaven and in the stars, all these terms were used, I say, till they passed for terms of real science. Thus metaphysics constituted a sort of polytheism, as mythology had done before: and to show you how little advantage these refined doctrines had over the other, I will bring an instance which I find in Mr. Selden, and which is plainly an ingraftment on the metaphysical doctrines of Pythagoras and Plato; though it be of a later date, as it must needs be, since it is

taken from the Jews, who had most probably no knowledge of Chaldaic philosophy till they went into captivity, nor of Greek philosophy till after the expedition of Alexander. Nothing appeared more shocking in all the Pagan mythology, than the carnal copulation of gods and goddesses with one another and with mortals, than their adulteries and their rapes, than gods begetting children and goddesses lying in: and yet we may see by a passage of Plutarch, in the life of Numa Pompilius, that these opinions were not only entertained by the vulgar, but were matters of grave speculation and of theological disputes, as much as the incarnation of the Word has been among Christians; for he says that the Egyptian doctors made this distinction; they held that a god might get a woman with child, but that a man could have no carnal commerce with a goddess. Now these copulations were carried on between souls in the spiritual world, according to the cabbalists, those famous interpreters of Jewish theology, though in a more decent manner, and in lawful marriage, as we learn from Selden.* "The cabbalists," he says, "assert, that as a soul descends from heaven into the embryo of every man, so a new soul is sent from above into every proselyte of justice; that which he had whilst he was a pagan either vanishing or returning." This new demand of souls, you see, required a new supply: and these ingenious metaphysicians soon found one that was more than sufficient. They imagined four palaces in heaven, where the souls of innumerable holy women are married to the souls of holy men; "and, they add, that as in marriages here on earth, bodies copulate with bodies, so, in those celestial marriages, souls copulate with souls, light with light."† Would not this sample of cabbalistical knowledge make any learned divine grieve, that the seventy books of this kind, which Esdras had collected for the use of wise men, are lost?

Metaphysics not only succeeded physics and mythology in the manner here observed, and became as great a fund of superstition, but they were carried still farther, and corrupted all real knowledge, as well as retarded the progress of it. Metaphysicians have not been quite agreed about the nature and object of their supposed science. Those we have last mentioned may be called and distinguished by the title, if they like it, of pneumatic philosophers, since their object is spirit and spiritual substances; how ridiculous soever it be to imagine spirit less an object of natural philosophy than body. Those we are about to mention may be decorated with a Greek name likewise, and be called

* De jure nat. et gen. juxta discip. Ebræor. l. 2, c. 4.

† Addunt ut in conjugiis hujus mundi, seu terrestribus, corpora corporibus conjunguntur, ita in alterius illius, seu cœlestibus conjugiis, esse conjunctionem animarum cum animabus, luminis cum lumine.

ontologists or ontosophists; since their object is, being in the abstract, "ens quatenus ens." But the name that suits best all the parts of metaphysics, is that of the preternatural science; because it is synonymous to chimerical science. Who, indeed, but the author of nature, can see and know to the utmost extent of it? And who that is not delirious, therefore, can presume to see and know beyond it? What principles can be laid, or how can any be laid, of a science that is supposed to be a first and universal science, and to contain the principles of all others, which are to be deduced from it? One might think that nothing can show so marvellously the wanderings of the human mind, and the prevalence of imagination over all the rational faculties, as this inveterate habit of dogmatising about spirit and spiritual substances, and even about God, the Father of spirits. But there is something still more absurd in the other part of metaphysics. In this, the foundations are laid in knowledge. Foundations narrow, and in no degree proportionable to the hypotheses raised upon them; but knowledge so real that it is intuitive, the knowledge that they have of their own spirits, minds, or souls, in a word of their own intellectual powers. In the other, the foundations are laid in a supposition which we know, or may know, intuitively to be false; for we may be as certain that the human mind cannot make the abstractions these philosophers pretend to make as we are certain that we can walk or run but cannot fly; and yet this whole branch of philosophy is built on the supposition that the human mind can and does make them. Such were the numbers of Pythagoras, if we know what they were: such were the ideas of Plato, and such is that fantastic science which perverts the whole order of real science, by pretending to descend from scientifical and axiomatical down to particular knowledge, and from universals to singulars, instead of attempting conformably to nature and reason the very reverse of this.

The supposed abstract ideas, whether simple or complex, were wrought up, by warm imaginations, into eternal essences, incorporeal substances, independent and divine beings that resided in or with the supreme intellect, and this may be properly called the first apotheosis of folly;* for the same men soon imagined a second. The second was that of the human mind or soul. The human mind or soul was of divine original, according to Pythagoras and Plato, and returned back to the soul of the universe when it left the body; to that soul which is of the same kind and nature, "ad id quod ejusdem generis et naturæ est."† Now the soul contracting much impurity in its descent into the body, and whilst it continues in that prison, these philosophers taught that

* Stultitiæ apotheosis.—Bacon. † Plato.

transmigrations of the soul through several bodies served not only as some degree of punishment, but likewise to purge it from these pollutions: and this was the famous doctrine of a metempsychosis, at least of Plato's; for between his and that of Pythagoras there seems to have been some difference. In one respect the difference is obvious enough. The metempsychosis of Pythagoras was I think general, and that of Plato not. Plato classed souls at their going out of the bodies they had informed into three sorts, the incurable, the curable, and the pure. The first went to the devil, as we should speak, at once. Transmigration served the purpose of the second, just as well as your purgatory, and prepared them to ascend to their ancient habitations in "domesticas quasi ——— sedes."* The last, having been purified before death, wanted no purification after it. For this reason it was that the philosophy we refer to, inculcated so much the necessity of abstracting the soul from matter, and of dying during life a philosophical death: the consequence of which was regeneration, being born anew, and putting off the old man to speak in Christian phrase.† Thus the soul might be accustomed to contemplate, in pure intellect, abstract forms and eternal essences; to retain or to recover by reminiscence its former knowledge of real beings, "vere entium;"‡ to rise to that supercelestial place and the field of truth, where souls feed on divine ideas.§ By such excursions as these, not unlike to those that are so ingeniously feigned in the world of Des Cartes,‖ the soul may know all things intuitively, like God, in this world, and become God in another.

> ——"ubi deposito conscendes corpore cœlum
> Immortalis eris divus."¶

Empedocles imagined his soul to be so pure, that a god might be said to dwell in him, and on that account called himself a god, "seipsum appellavit deum."** Plato softened this, by adding modestly, "quantum licet homini," as much as a man may be so; but that great pneumatic philosopher Athanasius was bolder than Plato, if he said, what I have seen somewhere quoted from his writings, that by a participation of the same spirit we are united to the Deity.††

* Photius. † Jamblicus. ‡ Ibid.

§ —— In locum supra cœlestem, inque campum veritatis —— elevatas, divinis ideis pasci.—Phot.

‖ Le monde de Des Cartes, a critical satire on the Cartesian philosophy by Father Daniel, the Jesuit.

¶ Carm. aurea.

** Sext. Empiric. adv. Math.

†† Participatione spiritus conjungimur Deitati.

SECTION IX.

Upon the whole, we may venture to pronounce that metaphysicians have always proceeded on a false supposition, by neglecting the real phenomena of the human mind, and by ascribing to it an imaginary power. We may venture to say, that their principles became profane and impious, when they deified their own ideas by the first apotheosis I have mentioned, and that they terminated in blasphemy, enthusiasm, and madness, when they deified their own souls by the second. Such philosophy as this, however, suited extremely well the genius, and, if I mistake not, the design of Plato. He was much more a poetical philosopher than Homer was a philosophical poet: and he had the worst grace imaginable when he banished the latter out of his Utopia, whose writings, with no more help than his own required to fix the allegorical and mystical senses, would have done just as much good in his whimsical republic. If Homer has done no good, he has done no lasting hurt to philosophy; whereas Plato, and his scholar Aristotle, did not only improve much error, but diverted men from the pursuit of truth: and this they did, not only in their own age, but have continued to do it at several periods, and in several degrees, down to ours. Plato treated every subject, whether corporeal or intellectual, like a bombast poet and a mad theologian,* "per ambages deorumque ministeria." Aristotle, like an ontosophist and a dialectician, with all the cavil† of words and captious disputation, which serve to nothing more nor better than to exercise a vain and trifling subtilty of wit, and to prove equally well for instance, that‡ mice gnaw or do not gnaw cheese, which is an example that Seneca brings by way of ridicule on such philosophers as these, and which might have been applied very strongly to Zeno the founder of his sect, to Chrysippus, and all the heroes of the Portic. But I choose to confirm, what I advance concerning the characters of these two philosophers, in better words and on a better authority than my own. My Lord Bacon observes, that almost all the ancient naturalists, such as Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, and Democritus subjected mind to things.§ That is, they never lost sight of the phenomena of

* —— Tumidus poeta, theologus mente captus.—Bacon de Interp. Nat.

† —— Verborum cavillatio——et captiosæ disputationes, quæ acumen irritum exercent.—Sen. ep. 45.

‡ Mus syllaba est: mus autem caseum rodit: syllaba ergo caseum rodit. Mus syllaba est: syllaba autem caseum non rodit: mus ergo caseum non rodit. —Ibid. ep. 48.

§ —— Mentem rebus submiserunt.

the visible world, but made them the rule, as well as object, of their inquiries: and what is said about this object of physics, the corporeal world, will hold equally well about the other, the intellectual. But Plato,* he adds, subjected the world to thought, and Aristotle even thought to words: the study of philosophy turning into disputation and plausible discourse, and a severe inquisition after truth being laid aside. The meaning of all which is plainly this, that these men turned physics into metaphysics and logic; that in order to make, or to appear to make, which answered their end perhaps as well, important discoveries about the nature and truth of things, one of them had recourse to abstract meditation, which agitates the mind in a perpetual round, and can never terminate in certainty for want of a sufficient criterion; and the other, to an artful use of words by which a learned ambiguity is maintained, and the whole business of philosophers is to tie and untie these verbal knots.† For these reasons, and surely they are decisive, the learned chancellor concludes, that their systems of philosophy ought rather to be rejected in the whole kind than to be refuted particularly, since they are the systems of men who affected to speak much, and who knew little.‡

It was said, in the beginning of this essay, that the pretensions to science unattainable, which end always in fantastical hypotheses, might be excusable in those who made the first essays in philosophy, but were without excuse in those who succeeded them, in the course of philosophical generations. The reflection was levelled, and very justly, at Plato and Aristotle in a particular manner. To pass any such judgment on those who went before them would be very unfair; because their writings are not in our hands, as those of these two philosophers are, if indeed the canon of Aristotle's be as well ascertained as that of Plato's, and because the little we can learn of their opinions has been delivered down to us in broken incoherent passages, in confused and inaccurate collections, and by men very often who did not understand them, or who had their reasons for misrepresenting them. To conceive this the better, we need only consider what informations we have of philosophical systems, more

* At Plato mundum cogitationibus, Aristoteles vero etiam cogitationes verbis adjudicarunt, vergentibus etiam tum hominum studiis ad disputationes et sermones, et veritas inquisitionem severiorem missam facientibus.—Parm. Teles. et Dem. Philos.

† Nectimus nodos, et ambiguam significationem verbis illigamus deinde dissolvimus.—Sen. ubi sup.

‡ Quare hujusmodi placita magis toto genera reprehendenda, quam propriè confutanda videntur. Sunt enim eorum qui multum loqui volunt, et parum scire.—Bac. Parm. &c.

modern than those we speak of, and given us by men who were themselves philosophers. I might instance in many, but I will content myself to ask, whether he that should take all his notions of Stoicism from Velleius, or of Epicureanism from Balbus, or of both from the declamation of Cotta, would do much justice to the Portic, or to the garden of Gargettus? These philosophies were absurd enough of themselves; but they were made more so by representation.

We know, in general, that there were philosophers in Greece of great merit before Plato and Aristotle; that Plato borrowed from them, as well as from Homer, without any acknowledgments of the debt, and that Aristotle did his best to defame or destroy their works: for Aristotle, like an Ottoman prince, as my Lord Bacon was fond of observing, endeavored to put all his brethren to death, and succeeded in his barbarous design.*— Among these, and probably at the head of them, Democritus may be placed. His great reputation gave occasion to silly people, as great reputations do sometimes, to invent a thousand silly stories of him. But of all these, no one was more impertinent than that of his putting out his eyes that he might meditate with less distraction, which Plutarch, in his treatise about curiosity, says was false, but generally reported. Another, which we find in Plutarch's table discourse,† is much more in character. Democritus, having eat a fig which had a taste of honey, far from shutting his eyes and contemplating the first sweet, he started up from his table in haste to examine the tree and the place where it grew. His maid indeed saved him that trouble by owning that she had put the figs in a honey pot. But his first, and as it were habitual, impulse was to make use of his eyes and to examine the phenomena by observation and experiment, which he made the rule of his inquiries, the criterion of his opinions, and the foundation of all his philosophy. "Ætatem inter experimenta consumpsit," he passed his whole life in experiments.

Diogenes Laertius witnesseth how averse Plato was to this philosopher, and in truth Pythagoras was more according to his heart. But it were to be wished, since Plato was to have so great an influence on the progress of science, and since his spirit was to possess philosophers for so many ages, that he had taken his method of philosophising from Democritus rather than from the Samian. The Samian had been instructed, in his travels, in all the parts of philosophy, and he brought particularly the true solar system, no doubt, from his eastern masters. He brought

*——Illum scilicet, Ottomannorum more, in fratribus trucidandis occupatum fuisse; quod et ei ex voto successit.—De Interp. Nat. et alibi.

† Sympos. lib. i, c. 10.

likewise many of their superstitious customs and opinions, and involved, like them, all his doctrines, even the plainest precepts of morality, in mystery. He appears, by the accounts which we find of him in Diogenes Laertius, in Plutarch, in Porphyry and Jamblicus, to have learned among the Egyptian priests and the Magi the great secret of pursuing ambition under the veil of learning, wisdom, and sanctity, and to have formed in his travels the project which he undertook at his return to execute, the project of opening a school, founding a sect, instituting a religion, and governing all the Greek colonies in Italy and Sicily. Democritus travelled, like him, and went to the same schools. In this they were alike. But they differed much in the other respects, which could not fail to determine Plato against Democritus, and in favor of Pythagoras. Neither of them were magicians, I suppose, any more than our learned friar, whom the ignorance of his age would have made to pass for such: and as the credulity of Pliny made him represent them and others to have been.—But as Democritus was no more a magician than every able naturalist, chemist, and mathematician, will appear in some ages, so he seems to have pretended to no supernatural science and power as Pythagoras did, and much less, like him, to have been the Delian Apollo, or any other divine person clothed with humanity and conversing with men. In his disputes with the Magi, he seems to have opposed real physics to imaginary metaphysics, and his knowledge of the animal, vegetable, and mineral world, to all their dreams about the intellectual and spiritual. What we know of the atomical system of this philosopher, whether he invented it, or Leucippus, or a certain Phœnician named Moschus long before either of them, may seem little consonant to true theism: and yet his animated atoms, and his intelligent and divine species, may be reconciled to it, as well as some opinions that very orthodox divines have advanced. Philosophers may speak too little, and too much, of the Supreme Being and first cause of all things: and neither of old, nor in our days, has the due mean been enough observed. Now if it does not appear that Democritus, whose object was not theology, and among whose works, the catalogues of which have been rather falsely lengthened than shortened, wrote any treatise of that sort, we may suppose that he made too little mention, or no mention at all of the Supreme Being, without supposing him for that reason an atheist. Whereas Pythagoras, who made theology his capital, reasoned always from heaven to earth, parcelled out the divine nature into a vast variety of beings, interested it and mingled it in every thing, and contrived to render physics a rhapsody of enthusiastical opinions and fables; of which proceeding the Timæus in Plato is a very strong and undeniable ex-

ample. To conclude this comparison, I will only add, that if Democritus did not acknowledge the unity of a first intelligent cause, and that was objected to him by a Pythagorean Platonist, for they grew in time to be confounded together, one might ask that famous question, is it no matter "utrum Deum neges, an infames?" whether you deny or defame God? The ignorance may deserve pity. The defamation deserves abhorrence.

If I have singled out these two, among the philosophers who preceded Plato, and have dwelt so long on their different characters and different methods of philosophising, it has been to show, the more sensibly by the contrast, how and through what channels the wild metaphysics and all the profane theology of the East has come down principally to these enlightened ages of the West, and how, by the pursuit of unattainable knowledge, philosophers have gone out of the true and natural road to truth into that which has led them into error, and must keep them in it, by corrupting science even in the first principles.

It is a very true observation, and a very common one, that our affections and passions put frequently a bias so secret and yet so strong on our judgments, as to make them swerve from the direction of right reason: and on this principle we must account, in great measure, for the different systems of philosophy and religion, about which men dispute so much, and fight and persecute so often. But it is not so commonly observed, though it be equally true, that as extensive as this principle is in itself, since it extends to almost all mankind, the action of it in one single man is sometimes sufficient to extend the effects of it to millions. Many a system, and many an institution, has appeared and thrived in the world as a production of human wisdom raised to the highest pitch, and even illuminated by inspiration, which was owing, in its origin, to the predominant passion, or to the madness of one single man. Authority comes soon to stand in the place of reason. Men come to defend what they never examined, and to explain what they never understood. Their system, or their institution, to which they were determined by chance, not by choice, is to them that rock of truth on which alone they can be saved from error:* they cling to it accordingly, and doubt itself was this rock to the Academicians.

What has been said cannot be illustrated better than by the example of Plato. He flourished, as we have observed, about two centuries after the commencement of the philosophical age

* —— De rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhærescunt.—Acad. Quæst. l. 2.

in Greece; for I think that we must place the commencement at Thales, wherever we think fit to place the end of it. The Ionic, the Eleatic, the Italic sects were already founded, and had made much progress and much noise in the learned world, by the public lessons, whether in regular schools or not it matters little, and by the writings and disputations of several great philosophers, by whom the honor of these schools had been supported, their different hypotheses improved, and their different methods of investigating truth defended. I have said before, that it is impossible to descend into the detail of these systems of philosophy with any assurance: and I will add, in this place, that I have never read any pretended explanations of them attempted by modern scholars, even in an intelligible manner, for this is not always the case, which might not have been for the most altered, and sometimes contradicted entirely, on the authority of the very same fragments. One thing is certain, however, and we may affirm very safely, that the difference between attainable and unattainable, real and fantastic knowledge, and between the methods that led to one or the other of these, was not hard to be discerned after all the essays that had been made in every part of philosophy, and that were still making when Plato arose. We may believe that there were some who did begin to discern it accordingly, how much soever their notions concerning the first philosophy had been corrupted, and the use of their reason had been perverted by Egyptian and eastern prejudices. That Anaxagoras did, we cannot doubt; and the censure Socrates passes on him in the Phædo, makes his panegyric on this head.

Democritus passed his whole life, and he lived to be more than an hundred years of age, in a constant application to experimental philosophy. But few there were then, or will be at any other time, who prefer solitude to society, leisure to power, knowledge to wealth, and silent obscure truth to talkative and glittering error, as this philosopher did. If Plato had followed his example, he might have made possibly a great revolution in the philosophy of his own age, and might have laid posterity under the obligation of learning from him the way to real, instead of being misled by him into chimerical, science. He might have stood like a polar star to direct future generations in their inquiries after truth, instead of becoming an ignis fatuus, that has danced before their eyes, and has led them into error. But those very dispositions of mind, and that very character which hindered Plato from following this example, procured him all the reputation he acquired, and has enjoyed so long. In those days, as in ours, philosophers sought fame rather than truth, and the

foolish applause of mankind could not fail to strengthen that natural bias.

The Greek philosophers, for the most part, resembled the Greek historians mentioned by Strabo. Plato did so most eminently. The historians, observing how fond their countrymen were of those who wrote fables, turned history into romance, and studied to make their relations marvellous and agreeable, with little regard to truth; in which they were encouraged after Alexander's expedition into Asia, by the difficulty of disproving any thing they said of countries so remote. Just so did the philosophers in general, and Plato in particular. They took their ideas and notions superficially and inaccurately from the first appearances of things, and examined and verified them as little as the others did facts. These ideas and notions were combined and compared by them as every man's fancy suggested: and they had, besides these, in the inexhaustible storehouse of fancy, as many "entia rationis" as might supply all their occasions. Thus the Greek philosophy became a chaos of wild discordant opinions and hypotheses, concerning divine and human, intellectual and corporeal nature, which could neither prove themselves, nor be reconciled to one another. They were the various offspring of imagination. Of imagination that affected to rove in the divine sphere, that of possibility, and would not be confined to the human, that of actuality. These philosophical romances, in the light in which they appear to us, may be compared not amiss to Amadis of Gaul, to Peirceforrest, and the rest of those heroical legends, which were written in defiance of history, chronology, and common sense, as the others were in defiance of nature, and real knowledge, which were the amusements of ignorant ages, and which are feigned so agreeably by Cervantes to have turned the brains of Don Quixote. I apprehend that few of them had even the merit which La Calprenede claimed in favor of his Cassandra; for he boasted that, among the fictions it contained, there was no one which might not be deemed true consistently with history: whereas in the ancient philosophical hypotheses, how little soever we know of them, we know enough to be sure that there were many opinions advanced absolutely inconsistent with the nature of things, and with the dictates of right reason; such as were not only unsupported by either, but as were contradicted by both.

I have touched already the principles from whence all this reasoning madness proceeded; for there is such a thing: and Buchanan used the expression "gens ratione furens," very properly. The man, who walked soberly about in the bedlam of Paris, and believed himself God the Father, was certainly mad:

and yet he reasoned extremely well when he assured the company that the other, who called himself God the Son, was an impostor; because he who was the father knew him not, nor had ever seen him in heaven. Thus the philosopher, who is in such haste to arrive at general, that he neglects particular knowledge, and takes a bold leap from a few clear and distinct ideas to the first principles of things, how well soever he reasons, is mad. Des Cartes was mad, whenever he did so: and none but Fontenelle would have made it a proof of his superiority over Newton, who did the very contrary. Ideas may be clear and distinct in the mind, and yet be fantastical; or have only metaphysical reality. But suppose them as real as you please, yet to make them proper materials of general knowledge, we must not attempt to leap, we must go step by step, and, by a slow gradation of intermediate connecting ideas, from particulars to generals. Besides, if we suppose all the ideas we have of both kinds to be in any case real, yet still they may not be sufficient, sufficient I mean in number. The stock we have may serve to establish one general axiom, but not another, more general, which we endeavor to raise upon it. In short, he, who imagines that he can extend general knowledge by the force of pure intellect and abstract meditation, beyond the foundations that he has laid in particular knowledge, is just as mad, in thinking he has what he has not, as he who thinks he is what he is not. He is just as mad as the architect would be, who should undertake to build the roof of the house on the ground, and to lay the foundations in the air.

It is not enough to say, that Plato was an heroical poet; nor after Longinus, that he derived from Homer, as from a great source, very many of his doctrines. He had the genius of those dithyrambic poets, who were said proverbially, and with allusion to their extravagant sallies of imagination, never to drink water. He speaks with great respect of a divine fury, the principle of sublime metaphysical and theological knowledge; and he was so full of it himself, that no man a little less delirious than Marsilius Ficinus, and a little less simple and bigot that Dacier, can read his writings, as those of a philosopher who sought truth in good earnest, and meant to instruct, rather than to amuse. Ficinus owns,* speaking of the language of this philosopher, that "he raves and rambles, observes no order like other men in his discourse, and appears rather to be some priest or prophet,

* Ad Laur. Med. prom.—furit enim interdum atque vagatur, ut vates, et ordinem interea non humanum servat, sed fatidicum et divinum; neque tam docentis personam agit quam sacerdotis cujusdem, atque vatis, partim quidem furentis, partim verò cæteris expiantis, et in divinum furorem similiter rapientis.

who raves and expiates and transports others into the same fury, than a man who goes about to instruct." Quintilian* speaks to the same effect: and even Cicero, as partial as he was, is forced to confess, that his style was rather of poetry than of prose. Let me add, that when he sinks from these imaginary heights of enthusiasm and false sublime, he sinks down, and lower no writer can sink, into a tedious Socratical irony, into certain flimsy hypothetical reasonings, that prove nothing, and into illusions that are mere vulgarisms, and that neither explain nor enforce any thing, that wants to be explained or enforced.

As the founder of the Academy drew the grotesque of his theology and metaphysics principally on the canvass that Homer and Pythagoras had spread for him, so it seems to me, that he proposed much the same objects of ambition to himself, as the Samian did. I do not mean to make any ill-natured reflection on his voyages into Sicily, nor on his intrigues with Dion, nor to insist on those which have been made. If he took a great sum of money, it was to buy books. If he rode into Syracuse in a gilded chariot, drawn by four white horses, and with all the pomp of a triumph, it was to humor the tyrant he meant to reform. If he obtained a district of country in Sicily, as Plotinus did some centuries afterwards in Italy, it was with the same design, to set mankind an example of the most perfect form of government. But still we must not think him as free from ambition as Socrates seems to have been. He took warning indeed from the examples of Pythagoras and Socrates. One taught him to moderate his political, and the other his philosophical zeal. But still, with all this apparent moderation, he had an ambition as real as any other, though compatible with moderation, and even leaning on the appearances of it, as on so many necessary supports. There is an ambition that burns as hotly under the mantle of a philosopher, or the cowl of a monk, as in the breast of a hero, and that exerts itself as effectually and often as hurtfully to mankind as the other. The cell of Bernard, or that of Hildebrand, even before he got the papacy, was a scene of as much intrigue, and as many ambitious projects, as that of Ferdinand the catholic, or of Charles the Fifth. If the characters of Dionysius the elder and the younger did not suffer Plato to regulate the government, and exercise legislation in Sicily, nor the dotage of the Athenian commonwealth in his own country, he acquired however a much greater dominion, than that of Syracuse or of Athens, and held a much nobler and higher rank

* Multum enim supra prosam orationem, et quam pedestrem Græci vocant, surgit ut mihi non hominis ingenio, sed quodam Delphico videatur oraculo instructus. l. 10, c. i.

than that of tyrant or of archon. He could not persuade his countrymen: to attempt to force them he thought unlawful. He retired therefore into the Academy and exercised in that retreat, like Bernard in his monastery, a far greater power, quietly and safely, than any that princes, or the principal men in commonwealths could boast of, with all the trouble and danger to which they stood continually exposed in their public life. His reputation, and the authority founded on it were such, that appeals were made, and ambassadors sent to him from different people, who solicited him to give them laws; a favor he bestowed on some, and refused to others. In another part of the resemblance between Bernard and him the saint indeed outdid the philosopher very much. He acquired immense wealth to his order, as well as to his particular convent. Whereas Plato left nothing but his philosophy to the philosophers of his sect, in general: and though he increased the revenues of the Academy, and though the custom of obtaining further acquisitions of wealth by the testamentary dispositions of persons who desired to encourage this school, prevailed from his time; yet all this would have been but a mite in the Bernardine treasury.

In the last part, which I shall mention, of resemblance between these two theologians, the pagan had vastly the advantage over the Christian. The order of the monks, instead of maintaining a superiority over other orders, was soon lost in the crowd of them; or if distinguished, was distinguished only by ignorance and luxury, and the pomp of their principal men. Whereas the sect of philosophers did not only eclipse all those that were more ancient, but outshine and outlast all that were cotemporary or of later institution. It spread into Asia when Alexander carried his arms thither, and into Egypt under the auspices of his successors. Platonism returned back, as it were, to those nations from whom the doctrines of it had been derived originally, altered indeed, but easily known, and therefore eagerly embraced by the true parents; because of the many allegorical, engimatical, cabbalistical, and mystical features which it retained of the family.

I do not believe that Plato was an enthusiast, in any other sense than your poets affect to appear such, when you call for inspiration and boast of the divine fury: and I could sooner persuade myself that he was never in earnest, than that he was always so; for which opinion I shall give you my reasons on some other occasion. But sure it is, that he has made enthusiasts in all ages, and in all churches; in the Christian church particularly, the most seraphic saints, and the most extravagant heretics: of all which I shall have occasion to speak more at large elsewhere; for as this philosopher had a place frequently

in our conversations, the mention of him will return frequently in these essays; which are repetitions a little extended of the former, and which claim some of the liberty allowed in the former.

Platonism flourished in Italy as well as in Greece, in Asia, and in Egypt: and the extravagant encomiums of Socrates, Plato, and their school, which we find so often repeated by Tully, would be alone sufficient to show us how highly this philosophy was esteemed in the Roman commonwealth. But though it was held in this esteem, I think that it had received at that time a blow which made it no longer fit to be propagated with success, as it was then taught. It was become a philosophy for sophists and rhetors only; and the dogmatical varnish, which had imposed at first, being taken off by Arcesilaus and Carneades, there remained nothing in it on which the minds of men, that seek naturally to be determined and fixed, could rest with complacency. Cuppeity and tableity, those ridiculous abstractions, which Diogenes laughed at Plato for supposing, had passed in the world; but to make men doubt of the existence of the cup and the table, was impossible.

The most absurd system, that is dogmatical, will prevail sooner and longer, and more generally, than that of the second or third Academy, or that of Pyrrho did, which arose about the same time; and the dullest Stoician, that ever was, would have persuaded men to assent to this proposition, "the world is a wise being,"* as readily as to this, in a bright sunshine, "it is now light," much sooner than Carneades would have persuaded them to lay aside all claim to decision, and to confound true and false in the class of probability.† It is not worth while to enter into any nice distinction that may be made between these philosophies. It is enough for our present, or any other reasonable purpose, to consider them all together as the systems, if they can be called systems, of men who entertained a perpetual suspension of mind, denied that any certainty was to be had, and disputed, at most, about probability. Such a man as Tully, who was ostentatious of his eloquence, might very naturally take, as he did, this part upon him.‡ He protests in his Academical Questions against any imputation of ostentation indeed; but there will be no uncharitableness in laying much more weight on what

* Nec magis approbabit nunc lucere —— hunc mundum esse sapientem. —Cic. Acad. Quæst.

† Philosophiam —— quæ confundit vera cum falsis spoliat nos judicio. —Ibid.

‡ Si aut ostentatione aliquâ adductus, aut studio certandi, ad hanc potissimùm philosophiam me applicavi, non modo stultitiam meam, sed etiam mores, et naturam condemnandam puto.

fell from him in the second Tusculan, where he confesses, that the custom of disputing for and against every thing, pleased him much, because it was "maxima dicendi exercitatio." In short, although the Academicians chose a much more easy task, when they undertook to refute the Stoicians and the Epicureans, and every other dogmatic sect, than that of defending the apparent dogmas of their master would have been; yet it seems to me, that they could not have stood long on that foot, nor have acquired the fame, which those madmen, who succeeded them in the profession of Platonism, acquired.

Antiochus, the third in succession from Carneades, and the last in the direct Academic line, began to deviate from the principle and conduct of Arcesilaus improved by Carneades: and, under pretence of reviving the old Academy and genuine Platonism, he taught dogmatically the doctrines he found in Plato, and blended them with those of the Portic and the Lyceum. From this time the false sublime of Plato began to speak more strongly than ever to the imagination, to the affections and passions, and, aided by the quibbles of Zeno, and the subtleties of Aristotle, in a short time after to the prejudices of mankind. I speak thus generally, because Platonic philosophy, which had been confined to schools in Greece, in Asia and in Egypt, or had been cultivated by a few particular geniuses at Rome, became fashionable and spread more than ever, when it had reassumed the gaudy dress of which it had been stripped in the Academy, for seven generations of philosophers at least. If the Roman ladies were not Platonics in love, they were such in philosophical speculation: and the emperors Adrian, Antoninus, and Marcus Aurelius, for instance, were as fond of the philosophical gown, as of the imperial mantle. Julian was so, not long after them, to a degree of fanaticism.

SECTION X.

When I come to speak of authority in matters of religion, of the Christian particularly, it will be proper to show how Platonism was incorporated with it: how the former served to deck out the artificial theology grafted on revelation, and how the latter served to perpetuate the former. Here I consider Platonism relatively to the effects it has had on science in general; and as to them, I say, that they have perverted the use of reason, and corrupted the first elements of human knowledge, or substituted such as are fantastical in the place of such as are real. These first elements of human knowledge are the ideas we acquire, according to the established order of human nature,

from the very dawn of life. As we grow up we learn of course to examine, to compound, and to compare these in some degree or other, and sufficiently for our ordinary use in the stations and circumstances of life wherein we are placed. If all this be not very accurately done, as it is not always, and perhaps seldom, there arises very rarely any great inconveniency from it. But the case becomes extremely different in matters of higher concern, in those of philosophy, and of the first philosophy especially. The more complex, and the more abstract our ideas and notions are, the more likely are we to frame or retain them ill, the consequence of which must be error on the most important subjects that can exercise the human mind. What shall we say then of a writer, who has not only propagated on these subjects fantastical ideas and notions for real, with an imposing air, but has attempted to turn mankind out of the way of framing any others on every subject? Shall we say, that he was the philosophical Homer? We shall trifle egregiously if we do. Allusion, allegory, metaphor, and every part of figurative style is the poet's language. Figments of imagination are his subject. The philosopher may sometimes employ the former cautiously, and under much control the latter never. Reason must be his guide, and truth alone his subject. When they are not such, though he keeps the name, he goes out of the character. He is guilty of fraud. Plato was eminently guilty of it, and the taint has descended, like that of original sin, to his posterity.

All his lineal successors have followed the example he set them in several forms, according to their several talents. They attempted it even in physics. But error of this kind has not been established, nor fixed, nor sanctified. Corporeal nature affords a public standard obvious to sense, and by which every man may try the ideas and notions of another, whether they be fantastic or real; and for this reason physical knowledge has been in almost a constant course of improvement, the errors have been from age to age corrected, and the sensible phenomena, which are the objects of it, being numberless, it has been vastly extended, as well as ascertained, in these latter ages. Since the revival of experimental philosophy, speculative whimsical naturalists have imposed no more than Ovid, who did not mean, nor than Lucretius, who did mean to impose, their physics for true philosophy.

Plato did his best to disgrace this criterion, and to persuade men not to trust to it, even to verify their simple ideas of sensible objects. Metaphysics suited his purpose better, just as a half light suits better than a full light the purpose of one who has false wares to vend. We have indeed in our minds a criterion of spiritual nature, and of matters purely intelligible. But this

criterion is not as public, and as common to all men, as the other. However fantastical, inadequate, or confused and obscure the ideas and notions of another man may appear to me, he is at liberty to affirm, that they appear quite otherwise in his mind. and though I may not believe him, I cannot contradict him. What can I say to a mystic, who boasts of special grace, and divine illuminations: or to a metaphysician, who pretends to make incomprehensible abstractions, and to clamber up Plato's mystic ladder from opinion to knowledge, the knowledge of immaterial forms, more than this, I perceive no such illuminations, I can make no such abstractions, I have no such ladder? These divines and philosophers are stopped, like their fellow-creatures, on the very outskirts of the intellectual world, notwithstanding their boasts: and if they related nothing of it more than what they have felt, seen, and known, they would relate nothing more than other philosophical travellers. But as they pretend to have gone farther, they may well pretend to have felt, seen, and known more.

Plato was such a traveller, and the father of philosophical lying to us, who are not acquainted with those who preceded him. Those who preceded him might neglect an exact determination of ideas, and a steady use of words, the signs of these ideas, which is no more than all philosophers are apt to do. But he is to us the first who taught men, instead of distrusting, to renounce their senses in the search of truth: and, instead of taking their ideas from the outward impressions, and inward suggestions of nature, to take them from an assumed region of ideas which never existed out of delirious brains. This doctrine, that poisons science to the very roots, is in part so absurd, and in part so notoriously false, that we may justly wonder how he could mistake the truth in one case, and affirm, if he really meant to affirm, and expected to be believed, directly against it in the other. That we cannot have knowledge of sensible objects, absolute knowledge, a knowledge of the essences of the substances, is most true; not for the reason he gives, because they are in a perpetual flux, always generating, never existing: but because we cannot discern by our senses their inward constitutions and first qualities, nor any thing more than their effects on us. Such knowledge is relative to our state, and would not be the same in another. It is human knowledge: no more. But still it is one kind of knowledge, and very sufficient for us. I have not an opinion, I know that I am warmed or burned: and if Christianity had been never published, I should have known, not believed myself to be a man, not a cock. As Malebranche, who was transported by the delirium of Plato, by that of Des Cartes, and by his own all at once, made use of faith to realise sensitive

knowledge; so Plato found in the intellectnal world the forms and essences of substances, as well as the ideas and notions that we have mixed modes and relations. All these, according to him, were fixed and permanent, eternal exemplars and divine entities, and therefore the sole objects of science. Reason was placed between the objects of intellect and of sense. The "first belong to God, and to some of the elect among men."* When reason rises up to the first, it acquires the knowledge of things divine: when it descends to the latter, it is filled with the errors of opinion. Science is therefore "a comprehension of things divine by reason."† I take the substance of what is here said from Marsilius Ficinus, to whose exposition of Plato's meaning there can be no objection made: and I add, that if I took the whole, the jargon would be still more surprising.

What man, who was not in the delirium of a metaphysical fever, and who turned his eyes coolly and soberly inward, has not seen that we know nothing of sensible objects but what our senses discover to us, and our memory retains of them after they are discovered: and that all those ideal entities, the abstract forms of them, are the bold fictions of imagination? Who ever reflected upon the operations of his mind, and did not perceive, that all his ideas or complex notions of mixed modes and relations, are the creatures of the mind, who puts them together for her use as experience and observation direct, nay arbitrarily if she pleases; that he never discerned them any where but in his own mind; that they are of mere human production, and that, as they are often variously combined or compounded by different minds, so they are seldom preserved in any mind steadily and invariably? Shall we be afraid then to say, that the doctrine of ideas in Plato is absurd and false, and that he has by teaching it corrupted the first elements of knowledge? It is manifest that he has done so: too manifest to be denied, and for this reason his admirers have endeavored rather to accustom mankind to the absurdity, by their constant imitations of it, than to defend it.

Notwithstanding all that has been observed, and much more that might have been observed, to show the fallacy and impertinence of a philosophy that has been so long admired, this philosophy has rolled down a torrent of chimerical knowledge from pagan and Christian antiquity, with little opposition, and scarce any interruption, to the present age; for which reason it is as necessary to expose the futility of this philosophy now, as it would have been many centuries ago. Not only pagan but

* Intellectus autem Dei proprius, et paucorum admodum electorum hominum.

† Divinarum rerum certa comprehensio. Mars. Ficin. ep. in theætetum.

Christian theology has been derived from Plato in great measure; and, as strangely as that may sound, even from Homer too, if he imitated Homer as much, and borrowed as much from him as Longinus and others of the ancients affirm. There is a certain marvellous which dazzles and seizes the mind, the philosophical as well as the unphilosophical; and the man who thinking he understands, admires his own understanding, as well as the man who admires, because he does not understand. This gave a great lustre to the Platonic philosophy: and is employed in season and out of season, so as to run through almost every part of it. But there is something more to be observed. Plato affected to write so equivocally and so inconsistently, according to the different subjects, and different characters of interlocutors, whom he introduces in his dialogues, that he might pass either for a dogmatist, or a sceptic. The latter Academy took this hint: but they followed a middle course, denying certainty to the dogmatists, and maintaining probability against the sceptics: in which middle course they could not, however, have maintained themselves long, as it has been observed already. The latter Platonicians, therefore, assumed the doctrines of their master to be dogmatical, taught them with all their own improvements as such, succeeded better, and lasted longer. Thus has the fame of this school been preserved, and the philosophy been propagated under different forms, to one uniform purpose, to seduce men out of the precincts of real knowledge.

SECTION XI.

Not only curiosity was indulged, but vanity was gratified by it. An identity in nature, or a cognation, as the learned Cudworth calls it, of the divine and human mind being once established, it is no wonder, that the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge were confounded, and became undiscernible The farther we carry our discoveries concerning the animal system, wherein we have our place, the more proofs we find that all the parts of it are full of life, and sense, and intelligence, in an inconceivable variety of degrees, but in some degree or other: and Malebranche had reason to say, "les petits animaux ne manquent pas aux microscopes, comme les microscopes manquent aux petits animaux." Now the moral effect of such a survey as this should be, both a greater adoration of the Supreme Being, and a greater humiliation of ourselves, who are so closely connected with the rest of the animal kind. But the profane assumption we speak of here, which had its foundation in the Platonic and Pythagoric systems, tends to lessen our admiration and

adoration of the Supreme Being, or at least the humiliation of ourselves, by taking our thoughts off from the sensible connection between us and other animals, and by applying them to an imaginary connection between the divine and human nature.—There are no anthropomorphites I think left, but there have been men among the most devout theists of paganism, and there are those among Christian philosophers and divines, who join God and man as absurdly by a supposed similitude of intellect, knowledge, and manner of knowing, as those heretics did by a supposed similitude of figure. Vanity has not only maintained this absurdity among the followers of Plato, but spread it among those of different sects. I will not turn to the extravagant passages of this sort, that are to be found in the writings we have of the latter Pythagorician Platonists. I will mention one only from those of St. Austin, which happens to occur to my memory, and may serve "instar omnium." Nothing is superior to the human soul, says that father, but God. "Nihil est potentius; nihil est sublimius. Quicquid supra illam est jam creator est." This doctrine the saint learned, as he learned that of the divine logos, from Plato, or from those madmen, the disciples of Pythagoras and Plato. In short, the vanity of the human heart indulged itself in this kind of flattery so much, that even the Stoics borrowed the same notions. Human reason is, according to Seneca, not only a portion of the divine spirit immersed in body, the same in God and in man, with this sole difference, in him it is perfect; in us capable of perfection;* but it was an axiom of that school, that the soul is divine, and all divine natures are the same.†

Philosophers being thus drawn, in their own conceit, out of that class of beings in which the Creator had placed them, and having placed themselves, according to their own good pleasure, and without any other claim to it than arbitrary assumption, in a sort of middle state, at least, between God and man, in which too they pretended themselves able to place others by certain metaphysical nostrums, these mountebanks and their zanis were easily induced to imagine, that since their souls were immortal, and participant of the divine nature, they were capable of knowledge of all kinds, and of wisdom more than human, even whilst they wore the garb of humanity. Believing themselves wrapped up in pure intellect, whilst they were in truth transported by mere imagination, they assumed their knowledge, like their nature, to be divine. Clogged by bodies, and confined for a time to this inferior system, they could not enjoy the full pre-

* In corpus humanum pars divini spiritûs—diis hominibusque communis. In illis consummata est. In nobis consummabilis.

† Divinorum una natura est.

rogatives of their own, nor attain complete absolute knowledge. But still they enjoyed and exercised these prerogatives in a good degree, clogged and confined as they were, when they abstracted their souls from their bodies, by spiritual exercises and profound meditation, and rose by this abstraction in pure intellect up to contemplate the divine ideas, and to know, if not as much as God, yet in the same manner, and much more than other men. Plotinus, who was so ashamed to wear a body, that he would never suffer any picture of it to be drawn, had been ravished more than once, as Porphyry affirms, to an union with the supreme intelligence, and he himself had been so once. It was not hard for such philosophers to believe, and to make it believed, that the knowledge unattainable by others was attainable by them, and that whilst ordinary persons, incumbered by body, and groveling on earth, acquired with much pains a little particular knowledge, they had the metaphysical secret of rising to universals.

Such as these were the men, who, issuing from the schools of Pythagoric and Platonic philosophy, disturbed the progress of real knowledge, and by flattering the vanity of the human mind, turned it to fantastical. Heathens adopted these notions the more easily, because they had already adopted those of genii, of demons, of celestial and supercelestial gods, who formed a chain of intelligence from the human up to the supreme. Christians too might adopt them the more readily because they had other as undetermined ideas of cherubim and seraphim, of thrones, principalities, powers, and virtues, of archangels and angels, of three hierarchies, and nine choirs of celestial spirits, figments of crackbrained enthusiasts, such as Denys the Areopagite, and the scholars of St. Paul, if in truth there was any such person, and if some pious knave did not forge the book and an author for it. These notions might serve, as well as those of the heathens, to form an intellectual chain, and a short gradation of intelligence from God to man. But orthodox Christians had no need of any such chain. They knew by the Scriptures, that the correspondence between God and man was often immediate and even intimate and familiar with his elect, and with such purified souls as were prepared for it. They found in the old testament one example of a patriarch translated very corporeally into heaven, and one in the new of an apostle ravished thither, he knew not how. But the whole tenor of the sacred writings represented the Supreme Being in frequent conference with his creatures, God covenanting, or making bargains with men, and man with God; God holding the language of man, reasoning, arguing, expostulating, in a very human manner, animated by human affections, and appealing to human knowledge. In short, they be-

lieved farther, on the same authority, that the Word, the wisdom of the father, the very God, had been incarnated here on earth, assumed a human body, lived like a man with men, and died at once by their hands and for their sakes. It could not be hard surely for those who believed all this, and who were accustomed to think in this manner of the divinity, to be persuaded, that God knew by the help of ideas, like man, so close was the analogy between their natures; that there were two regions of ideas, the one of ideas of sense, the other of ideas of pure intellect; that the former being nothing more than representations of appearances, and relative solely to the system in which they arose, nothing more could be acquired by them than probability, and opinion founded on it, sufficient indeed for vulgar use, though not so for philosophical purposes; but that minds illuminated by philosophy could rise to the higher region in which alone certainty and scientifical knowledge were to be acquired by contemplating those intellectual ideas, abstract natures, eternal essences, incorporeal substances, and all the objects of metaphysics.

From such fantastical notions we know, that men set out in search of fantastical knowledge above two thousand years ago, And how much sooner we cannot say. In hopes of reaching unattainable, they neglected attainable knowledge, scorned to confine themselves to that, to which they were confined by the author of nature, and attempting to rise above the level of humanity, they sunk below it; for they surely are below it, who imagine themselves to be what they are not, to have knowledge where they can have none, and to want it where it lies open to their industry.

It would have been no agreeable attempt in those days, nor is it a welcome one in these, to fix the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge. The philosophers we speak of are as ridiculous in a quite contrary sense, as the learned mandarins of the Chinese. The mandarins had decided, that China, a part of Tartary, the other states that lay round them, and the neighboring islands contained the whole world. They knew no other, they inquired after no other, and were astonished therefore when the Jesuits showed them a map of the two hemispheres. The philosophers remain unacquainted with their own country, and inquire little about it, or about those that lie nearest to it. They are wholly taken up with imaginary countries at an immense distance, where they never were, and concerning which they can have no intelligence from any that have been there. But the absurdity of absurdities is this. They pronounce dogmatically, and they pretend to demonstrate when they speak of these unknown countries, and they sink into doubt and hypothesis when they speak of their own.

Could philosophers have been persuaded to analyse the hu-

man mind, to examine intuitively the faculties of it, and to compare them with the objects of their inquiry, the extravagant notions spoken of might have been soon exploded, the progress of fantastical knowledge might have been stopped early, and that of real knowledge might have been advanced without interruption.

But the ill star of knowledge contrived to render this impracticable. It has been said, that Aristotle was an ungrateful scholar to his master Plato. It may be so. But this obligation, at least, the master had to the scholar. The scholar raised a mist that hindered men from discerning, as they might have done sooner or later, the absurdity of his philosophy: and this mist continued thickening before the eyes of men for many ages. The Romans were far from correcting and improving the Greek philosophy. They contented themselves to translate and imitate: and the same servile manner of philosophising was followed after the resurrection of letters. A ridiculous veneration for Plato revived with them: and Aristotle maintained in the schools the empire he had usurped every where during the dark ages of Gothic, of Arabian, and of ecclesiastical barbarity. The ancient fathers of the church had recommended these two philosophies sufficiently to more modern doctors, by their example and writings. But Aristotle had helped to defend what Plato had helped principally to establish, and as defence grew more and more necessary from age to age, so the reputation and authority of Aristotle, which were great in the Mahometan, seemed to rise above those of Plato in the Christian schools of philosophy: or at least to be more employed in them. I am not ignorant that many passages of the fathers and other Christian writers may be cited against the Peripatetic philosophy. But these passages serve only to multiply proofs, that these venerable persons were apt to contradict one another, and even themselves. Cardinal Palavicini was very angry with father Paul for saying, when he speaks of the sixth session of the Council of Trent, wherein so much use was made of the distinctions of the Stagyrite,* that without this assistance "we should have had many articles of faith the less." The cardinal denies the fact so little, that he justifies the proceeding by the example of those ancient councils, who did the same when they distinguished so nicely substance, person, and hypostasis. I know not whether it be true, though I incline to believe it if Melancthon said it, that the ethics of Aristotle were read publicly in some churches instead of the gospels. But every one knows, that he and his philosophy have been spoken of by great divines and most devout persons of the

* Noi mancavamo di molti articoli di fede.—Hist. del con. trid. l. 2.

Christian and Mahometan Churches, in terms so hyperbolical, that they are blasphemous.

By such combinations of circumstances, and by others that were favorable to the Aristotelian philosophy, a jargon of words, that seemed to explain, without explaining, and the rules of a dialectic, that seemed to prove, and that did prove indifferently either in favor of truth, or of error, took up the whole attention of philosophers, and rendered it impossible for them to make any advances in learning and knowledge. All the rational powers of the strongest minds were so misapplied, that giants employed themselves in picking straws; and men whose intellectual sight might be compared to that of Lynceus, wandered about in a metaphysical and logical mist, always in search of truth, finding it seldom, and mistaking often even error for it. Fantastical ideas, new invented words, and new applications of old words put into a quaint syllogistical form, made up the sum of the mirabilia, the inopinata, and the paradoxes of the Stoics. Much in the same manner did schoolmen proceed in subtilising their ideas and notions, and in turning and winding them by rules of art, without any concern to compare them with nature, and to verify and fix them by what is. The consequence has been, that although much of the cant of the schools is laid aside, yet many fantastical or undetermined ideas and notions, and many unmeaning words, or words of vague signification, which grew into use, or were confirmed in use then, impose still; and that even some of our finest writers banter themselves and others with them. It must not be imagined, that he who reasons, or seems rather to reason closely and consequentially, has therefore truth always on his side. To be sure of this, we must be sure that his words have ideas and notions perceivable by us, attached to them; we must be sure that all these are steadily employed, and we must be able, by a careful analysis of the ideas and notions, where there is the least room for doubt, to discern whether they are fantastical or real, and adequate and complete, clear and distinct, or the contrary, relatively to the subjects about which they are employed. If we do this, we shall be neither seduced by declamation, nor deceived by argumentation. Some writers impose, as fairies and enchanters in romances are said to have done; but if we do this, their charms will be broken, and either nothing, or something extremely absurd or weak will appear, where a stupendous and solid pile presented itself to our first sight. If we neglect this, not only Malebranche, or the bishop of Cloyne, those excellent poets, may lead us agreeably "per ambages deorumque ministeria," through such mazes of error as none but the brightest genii are able to contrive; but your ghostly father, if you had one, might undertake to convince you by dint of logic, that when he

affirms the same body to be at the same instant in different places, he is far from affirming, that the same body is and is not in the same place.

SECTION XII.

It will sound oddly to some ears, that the right use of reason, and the right conduct of the understanding in the investigation of truth, and the acquisition of real knowledge, is a very late discovery; and yet nothing is more certain. It was not near so soon after the resurrection of letters, as it might have been expected, that the fantastical and fashionable philosophy of Plato and Aristotle began to be exploded. Little by little, however, there arose men, who made this use of the light that increased gradually in the orb of science. There were some essays made, faintly, diffidently, and occasionally at first, like those of men, who emerging out of darkness, were dazzled as well as enlightened, or of men who were sensible that they might suffer for saying, that they had seen what they had seen, or that they knew what they knew, in opposition to the confirmed prejudices of mankind. Others followed with greater assurance, like men born in the light, whose eyes were able to bear a greater effulgence of it, and who besides this had less, for even they had something to fear from ecclesiastical, abetted by civil power. One of these, and the first that deserves to be named in this roll, was our Verulam, that astonishing genius, who durst form the design of rebuilding science from the foundations. I presume not to say how near he brought this design to bear, nor how practicable he left it. But this I may say, that the foundations were ill laid before his time, and that he laid, on the rock of nature and truth, such as can alone support this building. The meanest cottage, that art ever raised, can rest on no other safely, and the most stupendous pile of philosophical systems may rest on these immovably. Whatever esteem he was tempted to think, by a review of their scattered remains, that the more ancient philosophers of Greece might deserve, he considered the works of Plato and of Aristotle, which have been alone preserved, as the bane of philosophy. They had been followed servilely from their own age to his, by which means they stood as barriers against all improvement, and the poisonous springs they had opened continued to infect all the streams of knowledge. He attempted, therefore, to depose these tyrants in philosophy, and to draw men off from the enthusiasm of one, and the sophistry of the other, from the contemplation of confused and ill abstracted ideas and notions, and from a wanton, not to say a fraudulent, use

of words, to the contemplation of nature, and a strict regard to things. The very first aphorism of the Novum Organum states the only true object of human knowledge, and limits that which every man may be said to have acquired, to what he has discovered of nature by observation and experience.*

Human knowledge, to be real, must be derived from, and tried by what really is, according to my Lord Bacon and to truth; and he was so far from indulging the licentious use which philosophers make of that dangerous power of the mind, the power of imagining what may be, and of erecting hypotheses into systems of knowledge, that he insists on the necessity, not that we should doubt of every thing, but that we should examine every thing, that we should purge our minds of all those idols, as he styles them, those false and superficial notions that are taken from vulgar opinion, and at best from philosophical rumor, which were the foundations of Platonism, though Plato used some sort of induction, and of Peripateticism; and finally, that the mind being thus prepared to receive the direct or reflected rays of truth, we should not reject, but assist and control sense in a course of learned experience, abstract our notions from things with the utmost accuracy, and proceed, as far as we can proceed in the same manner, to aphorisms and axioms more and more general.

Whilst the fame of this great man was fresh, and his works were in every learned hand both at home and abroad, Des Cartes arose, another luminary of the philosophical world, and I could easily suspect that my Lord Bacon's writings were not unknown to him; for as little as it is pretended he used to read, he did not disdain to borrow from authors of inferior note, of the the same country: and they who repay with ample interest, like Des Cartes, into the common stock of learning, need not be ashamed to borrow sometimes. The French philosopher, like the English, made clear and distinct ideas the necessary materials of knowledge. But then, as he left this important article too general and too loose, so whilst he built up truth with one hand, he laid a foundation for infinite error on the other. He disarmed the scholastics; but he furnished arms to the mystics. Besides clear and distinct ideas, he admits a certain inward sentiment of clearness and evidence. The word sentiment is applied in the French language so variously and so confusedly, that it becomes often equivocal. But since it is distinguished, on this occasion, from idea, it must be meant either to signify that immediate perception which the mind has of some self-evi-

* Homo naturæ minister, et interpres tantum facit et intelligit, quantum de naturæ ordine, re, vel mente, observaverit: nec amplius scit, aut potest.

dent truth, in which case it is not a principle of knowledge, but knowledge itself, intuitive knowledge; or else it must be meant to signify that apparent evidence wherewith notions and opinions enter into the mind of one man, that are not accompanied with the same evidence, nor received in the same manner, in the mind of another. Now in this case, the lively inward sentiment of Des Cartes is nothing better than that strong persuasion, wherewith every enthusiast imagines that he sees what he does not see, hears what he does not hear, feels what he does not feel, and, in a word, perceives what he does not perceive. If any thing else be meant by sentiment, thus distinguished from idea, as a principle of knowledge, I confess myself unable so much as to guess what it is. But notwithstanding this, Des Cartes holds a high rank among those benefactors to mankind in the advancement of knowledge, who freed human reason from the chains of authority. He improved natural philosophy by geometry, and geometry by algebra: in which respect, he showed the way to our Newton.

Gassendi was another of these reformers of philosophy, and the restorer of the atomical doctrine. He exposed even to ridicule, the dialectics of Aristotle: he disarmed the Peripateticians of these enchanted weapons, and would have completed, by his victories over them, the subversion of their long established empire, if he had not apprehended, with reason, enemies much more formidable than mere philosophers, because armed with ecclesiastical and civil power. It is this fear, which has hindered those who have combated error in all ages, and who combat it still, from taking all the advantages which a full exposition of the truth would give them. Their adversaries triumph, as if the goodness of their cause had given them the victory, when nothing has prevented their entire defeat, and reduced the contest to a drawn battle, except this, that they have employed arms of every kind, fair and foul, without any reserve; whilst the others have employed their offensive weapons with much reserve, and have even blunted their edge when they used them.

If it was my design to speak of all those, who have advanced real knowledge in all its parts, since the resurrection of letters, beyond such of the ancients, at least, as we are acquainted with, the roll would be a long one. But my intention being to speak of those alone, who have studied the human mind, rectified, or pretended to rectify, the errors of it, and thereby improved, or pretended to improve, our reason, I shall content myself to mention two that are the best known to me. Mr. Locke, and the author, perhaps I should say authors of the logic of Port-royal.

The first steps towards a right conduct of the understanding,

and a just discernment of unattainable knowledge, and of that which is attainable, in different kinds and degrees, are an accurate analysis of the mind, a careful review of the intellectual faculties, as well separately as in their co-operations, and an attentive observation of the whole intellectual procedure, natural and habitual, as it has been hinted already. When this is well and truly done by any writer, the reader will feel consciously that it is so; for he will perceive the phenomena of his own mind to be such as they are represented, and he will recollect, that the same things have passed there, though he has not always, or at all observed them. This happens to me when I read the essay on human understanding. I am led, as it were, through a course of experimental philosophy. I am shown myself; and in every instance there is an appeal to my own perceptions, and to the reflections I make on my own intellectual operations. I know that this method is disagreeable to some, and I am not surprised that it should be so. There are those who think they do not want it: and they are those who want it most. There are those likewise who fear it; because they apprehend that analysis of ideas and notions, that comparison of them with the real nature of things, and that steady precision in the use of words, which would reduce many a dogmatic system to pass for nothing better than a fanciful hypothesis, as it really is.

The logic of Port-royal will suit such persons as these, and especially those of the second sort much better. In whatever language or country this treatise had been published, it would have appeared to be not an art of thinking, but an art of thinking conformably to Christian doctrines, and to those of Rome particularly. It is contrived to mangle and distort human reason, so as to proportion it, I do not say to revelation, but to theology; though theology should be proportioned to reason: and I add, that if reason could be made by abuse to serve the purposes of this theology, it might be made by no greater, nay by the very same abuse, to serve the purposes of any other, Pagan or Mahometan. Now this proceeding is unfair; and he who holds it means to deceive, not to instruct. The true art of thinking must be the same among all mankind, since their intellectual system, and the things of nature from which their ideas and notions ought to be abstracted, are the same. But if this example was followed, the art of thinking would vary, as the different metaphysics of Mencius and Des Cartes, or the different theologies of the Bonzes and the Jesuits, vary. Art should direct practice: but thus, practice would direct art. There would be one art of thinking for Christians, one for the doctors of Mecca, one for the literati in China, and so on.

Though I give on this occasion, a preference to Bacon and to Locke over Des Cartes and the author of the logic of Port-royal, it is not from so mean and contemptible a motive as this would be, that they were Englishmen. The advancement of knowledge, and the improvement of reason are of common concern to all rational creatures. We are all of the same country in these respects: and he who thinks and acts otherwise is a promoter of faction in the great commonwealth of learning. As much as I admire these two philosophers, I am not blind to their errors; for even I, who have no telescopical eyes, can discern spots in these suns. I can discern a tincture, and sometimes more than a tincture, in Bacon, of those false notions which we are apt to imbibe as men, as individuals, as members of society, and as scholars, and against which he himself is very solicitous to put us on our guard. I am convinced, more by his example than by what he says, that these false notions render the admission of truth into the mind more difficult, and the hold of error more strong. I can discern, in Mr. Locke, sometimes ill abstracted and ill determined ideas, from which a wrong application of words proceeds, and propositions to which I can by no means assent. I confess farther, that I have been, and am still, at a loss to find any appearance of consistency in an author who published a commentary on the epistles of St. Paul, and a treatise of the reasonableness of Christianity, which he endeavors to prove by fact and by argument, after having stated, as clearly as he had done, the conditions and the measures of historical probability, and after having written, as strongly as he had done, against the abuse of words. I think that neither Bacon nor Locke have kept up entirely to their own rules. But I think these rules are established by them more truly than by any others.

That they are not so, in one very considerable instance, by Des Cartes, I have observed already, and shall not seek for any other in that respectable author. But the charge I have brought against the logic above mentioned is so very heavy, and this fault among others runs so evidently through the whole book, that I think it necessary to produce some examples of it. To produce them will be sufficient. I shall make few or no reflections on them. Turn, if you please, to the fourth chapter of the first part, and to the fourteenth of the second, which treat of the ideas of things and the ideas of signs, and of the propositions wherein the names of things are given to their signs. You will soon see how far this writer was from meaning any improvement to human reason, by all the trifling matter he puts gravely and dogmatically together.

That we have ideas which are made sometimes to stand as

signs of other ideas is true, and so we have ideas which are made to stand in the relations of cause and effect to other ideas. But the ideas of both these kinds may be considered unrelatively, and they become ideas of signs, or causes, or effects, by an occasional act of the mind, which joins them sometimes properly, and sometimes improperly in these relations to others. The idea of respiration, like that of spontaneous motion, is one of those that compose our complex idea of every animal. It is a part of the idea, not a sign of the whole. It cannot be the sign of any particular animal, because it is common to all animals. It cannot be the sign of animality, or the supposed abstract idea of animal, because we have no such idea. It cannot be the sign of that confused crowd of ideal animals that the mind represents to itself, whenever we endeavor to think of animals in general, any more than the sign of any particular animal. They all imply it, and they may be said to be so many signs of respiration, just as well as respiration to be a sign of them.

But be this as it will, about which it is silly to bestow many words, let us observe that this author, who pretends to teach men how to think, endeavors to impose on them very grossly, as grossly as if he had imagined that they could not think at all without his help. Having amused his readers with the hypothesis of ideas of signs, made such by nature in some cases, and by institution in others, that are sometimes certain and sometimes probable, all which is very proper to perplex the thoughts of young logicians; he slides in, as evident examples of what he advances, such as have not even an apparent connection with it. He distinguishes most nicely between signs that are joined to things, and signs that are separated from them. Symptoms, he says, the signs of sickness, are joined to sickness. Let it be that they are so in nature, and in our ideas, however this matter might be otherwise explained. But then he adds, as if all these were things analogous, "thus the ark, the sign of the church, was joined to Noah and his children, who were the true church at that time: thus our material temples, the signs of the faithful, are often joined to the faithful: thus the dove, the sign or figure of the Holy Ghost, is joined to the Holy Ghost: thus the washing of baptism, the sign or figure of spiritual regeneration, is joined to this regeneration." In speaking of signs that are separated from things, he is not so profuse of examples. He produces one only, but that as appositely as any of the others. It is taken from the sacrifices of the Mosaic institution, which were, he says, so many signs of Jesus Christ offered up in sacrifice.

I might conclude my extracts here. But since it is of use to show how great reason there is to guard against the fraud, as well as madness, of philosophy, it may be proper to mention a

few more passages of the same absurdity or ridiculous importance out of this famous book. We are told then farther, that "a thing may hide and discover another thing at the same time. It may be thing and sign at the same time, and may hide as thing, what it discovers as sign. Hot ashes, as a thing, hide the fire; as a sign, discover it. The forms that angels borrowed, as things, hid them; as signs, discovered them. The eucharistical symbols, as things, hide the body of Christ; as signs, discover it." Again, we are taught, that "the nature of a sign being to excite in the senses the idea of the thing figured by the idea of the thing figuring, as long as this effect subsists, that is, as long as this double idea is excited, the sign subsists, even though the thing be destroyed in its own nature. Thus, it is of no moment whether the colors of the rainbow, which God has taken for a sign that he will destroy mankind by a deluge no more, be real and true, provided that the same impression be always made on our senses, and that they (can he mean our senses?) make use of this impression to conceive the promise of God. Just so, it is of no moment that the bread of the eucharist subsist in its proper nature, provided that the image of bread, which serves us to conceive in what manner the body of Christ nourishes our souls, and how the faithful are united one with another, be excited constantly in our senses." One may now safely challenge the ablest professor in bedlam to crowd more nonsense into fewer words, and yet it is faithfully extracted from a book which is put into the hands of young men, as I remember that it was into mine, in order to improve their reason, by teaching them a right determination of their ideas, and a right conduct of their understanding.

To say the truth, though experimental philosophy has been vastly improved by the moderns, and though a true conduct of the understanding may be said justly enough to be a new discovery in general, yet the same reformers who have rooted up a monstrous crop of old errors, have left some of these, and have planted others. The first philosophy particularly has been overrun with both: and learning has finished the round which ignorance began. In the darkness of ignorance superstition prevailed: in the light of knowledge, overweaning curiosity, the offspring of self-conceit, as self-conceit is of pride. Both are natural to the human mind, and each of them developed itself into activity at different times, and in that state of things that was proper to it. Superstition first: for ignorant, uncivilised people, who are fierce to their fellow creatures, are timid and docile under every apprehension of superior power. Of these dispositions in favorable conjunctures, the Persian Zerdusht, whoever

he was, the Indian Foe, and the Arabian Mahomet, knew how to profit: and the magi, the bonzes, and the doctors of Mecca, were not at liberty, if they were inclined, to frame their notions of the first philosophy, according to nature and truth. They were to think on the principles their masters had laid. These were to be asserted, not examined. Fact was to be bent, and common sense perverted, into a conformity with them. Puerilities and vulgarisms were to be taken for marks of a divine simplicity, and the ravings of enthusiasm for the mysterious language of inspiration. If the case has not been quite so bad in the Christian world, yet I will undertake to show you, in another of these essays, as I endeavored to do in one of our conversations, that the superstitions of ignorant ages, and the fantastical knowledge of those that were more learned, have produced some as extravagant opinions in theology among Christians, orthodox and heretics, as any we can reproach to Mahometans, or even to the pagans, and that they work their effect even at this hour.

All errors, even those of ignorance and superstition, are hard to remove when they have taken long hold of the minds of men, and especially when they are woven into systems of religion. But there are some from which men are unwilling to depart, and of which they grow fond, for a reason that has been often touched. As men advance in knowledge, their self-conceit and curiosity are apt to increase, and these are sure to be flattered by every opinion that gives man high notions of his own importance. What contradictions and inconsistencies are not huddled together in the human mind? Superstition is produced, by a sense of our weakness; philosophical presumption, by an opinion of our strength; and superstition and presumption contribute alike to continue, to confirm, and propagate error.

A system of philosophy, which had not contained a system of theology, as well as of politics, would have been held in no esteem among the ancients. Many such were formed, but with these considerable differences between the two sorts. Errors in rules of policy and law were easy to be corrected by experience, like errors in natural philosophy. Nay the first were so the most, because how little regard soever philosophers might have to experience in either case, the truth would force itself upon them, or others; in one by the course of affairs; whereas it must be sought, to be had in the other. But when it was sought, it was obtained. Errors in theology and metaphysics could not be thus corrected; neither easily, nor at all, among men who seemed tacitly agreed to admit and confine themselves to no criterion in these sciences, neither to the phenomena of their own spirits in their doctrines about spiritual nature, nor to

the works of God and the conduct of his providence in their speculations about his attributes.

Another difference between systems of theology and those of politics and laws has been, and always must be, this, that the latter may be various, nay contrary to one another, and yet be such as right reason dictates; provided they do not stand in opposition to any of the laws of our nature. But in theological reasonings, and those which are called metaphysical, the various opinions may be all false, or if they are not all so, one alone can be true. This consideration should have had two effects. It should have rendered philosophers and divines more cautious in framing opinions on such subjects, and less positive in maintaining them from the beginning: and when they found a multitude of questions arise, which were indeterminable for want of a sufficient criterion, they should have ceased the pursuit of unattainable knowledge, and have confined themselves to the improvement of that which God has judged sufficient for us, and has given us the means of acquiring. The very contrary has happened to such a degree of extravagance, as must seem delirious to every one who is not in the same delirium. Can he be less than mad who pretends to contemplate an intellectual world, which he assumes, in the dull mirror of his own mind; of which he knows little more than this, that it is both dull and narrow? Can he be less than mad, who perseveres dogmatically in this pretension, whilst he is obliged to own that he arrives with many helps, much pains, and by slow degrees, to a little imperfect knowledge of the visible world which he inhabits, and concerning which he is therefore sober and modest enough to reason hypothetically? In a word, can he be less than mad, who boasts a revelation superadded to reason, to supply the defects of it, and who superadds reason to revelation, to supply the defects of this too, at the same time? This is madness, or there is no such thing incident to our nature: and into this kind of madness the greatest geniuses have been the most apt to fall; a St. Paul, profound in cabalistical learning; a St. Austin deep read in Plato; a father Malebranche, and a bishop of Cloyne. Elevation of genius makes them giddy: and these men, like those who are born in the purple, imagine they can do every thing they have a mind to do, because they can do more than others. The mistake has been fatal to both; to these heroes in philosophy, as well as to the others. Though all men are not placed on the same level, there is a level above which no man can rise: and he, who compares the nature of his mind with the nature of things, will be sure to find it.

I have now thrown upon paper all that occurs to my present thoughts, or all that I have leisure to digest and extend, of what

has been thrown out in many conversations concerning the folly and presumption of philosophers, the rise and progress of their boasted science, the propagation of error and superstition, and the partial attempts that have been made to reform the abuses of human reason. It has amused me in writing, I wish it may amuse you in reading, and be of instruction to us both. Regular treatises and complete systems you do not expect from me: nor should you have them, if I had a much higher opinion of my own capacity than I have. My superiors in knowledge and parts would do better perhaps, if even they were content to write essays, that they might improve, correct, or reject, as I am always ready to do, on farther observation, reflection, and information. In the mean time, what has been now said may be sufficient, as I think, to establish the general proposition, that there would be more real knowledge, and more true wisdom among mankind, if there was less learning, and less philosophy.

POSTSCRIPT TO THE SECOND ESSAY.

Having observed, in the foregoing essay, how absurdly and presumptuously philosophers reason upon a supposed analogy of the human with the divine mind, whilst they scorn to look downwards, and to observe the real analogy that there is between the mind or soul of the whole animal kind, the human species included; it has come into my thoughts to add the reflections that follow as relative to the same object.

You may see in Tully,* that the Stoics, who observed the internal and external constitutions of men to be very differently affected according to the different climates, concluded from thence, that there were creatures of more sublime natures in purer air, and filled unknown spaces with these unknown inhabitants. I am far from embracing this hypothesis; but it seems to me, that there is a probability sufficient to force our assent to another, which has prevailed less, because it is founded on a degree of astronomical knowledge that few persons have now, or had anciently; whereas the former is a mere wild assumption of imagination. The hypothesis I mean, is that which we find in the Cosmotheoros of Mr. Huygens, and from which Fontenelle has borrowed the materials of his pretty book of the plurality of worlds. Though I give this hypothesis so modern an original,

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

because it is best known and sufficient for my purpose, I am not ignorant that it had been advanced before, and that Orpheus, as well as Mr. Huygens, peopled the planets. We have reason to think he did, by those verses which Proclus has preserved, and in which the Thracian bard speaks of houses and cities in the moon. But how old or how new soever this hypothesis may be, it assumes, you know, that the planets of our solar system, and the same may be assumed of those of a multitude of other solar systems, which the immensity of the universe contains, are worlds that have an analogy with ours, and the habitations of animals that have an analogy with us. The analogy must be, no doubt, very remote, in such a vast variety of positions, constitutions, and laws of nature: but still there may be, and there are very probably, relations both physical and moral between all these numberless worlds and systems of worlds, as between various parts of one stupendous whole, and the habitations of ten thousand times ten thousand millions of intellectual-corporeal beings, who live, like us, under the providence, general or particular, of the incomprehensible Creator of all things.

Shall we be so absurd and so impertinent now as to imagine, that all these creatures of God, though corporeal like men, are confined to the same degree of intelligence, or even to the same manner of knowing? Or rather than believe that they are in these, and perhaps in other respects, superior to us, shall we assert that there are no such beings, and deny that they exist, though we discover some of their habitations? Philosophers who lived before the invention of microscopes, might have asserted just as well, that the "minima naturæ," imperceptible by their minuteness, as these beings by their distance, did not exist. We cannot discern a gradation of beings in other planets by the help of telescopes, as we observe such a gradation by the help of microscopes in our own; but the gradation of sense and intelligence in our own, from animal to animal, and of intelligence, principally, up to man, as well as the very abrupt manner, if I may say so, in which this evidently unfinished intellectual system stops at the human species, gives great reason to believe, that this gradation is continued upwards in other systems, as we perceive it to be continued downwards in ours. We may well suspect that ours is the lowest, in this respect, of all mundane systems; since the rational is so nearly connected, as it is here, with the irrational: and there may be as much difference between some other creature of God, without having recourse to angels and archangels, and man, as there is between a man and an oyster.

We are not able to conceive any manner of knowing, which we have not: and yet certain it is, that there may be many such.

But even if we assume arbitrarily, that there is no other manner of knowing, as those profane divines do who confine that of God himself to knowledge by ideas; yet will it be still evident, that other creatures of God may enjoy the same faculties that we have in a more perfect manner. It is easy to conceive, for instance, that there may be animals whose senses can penetrate the inmost constitutions of substances, and who, having ideas of their real essences, know the first general principles and causes, where we know nothing more than some particular effects. There may be minds wherein ideas and notions once received or framed, never fade nor vary. Such minds may discern, at one glance, and by immediate intuition, the agreement or repugnancy of all their ideas and notions. The solution of the most difficult problem may be to them as easy, as the comparison which shows the equality of twice two to four is to us. In a word, there may be, and it implies no contradiction to suppose that there are, creatures in other systems of animal being tempered with finer clay, cast in nobler moulds, than the human, and animated by spirits more subtile and volatile than ours, whatever theirs or ours are. It were to be wished that philosophers, who are so intent on the least probable hypotheses, would contemplate this, and would compare the manifest imperfections of their own nature with the possible, nay probable, excellences of other animal natures. They might avoid one extreme into which they are apt to fall, by looking down on inferior beings; and another, by looking up at superior. This double view would teach them neither to undervalue human nature, as some have done; nor to overrate it, which is the folly of more.

What has been here said concerning the intelligent inhabitants of other planets is purely hypothetical. It can pass for nothing more. But I am sure that it is much more consistent, and more conceivable than the other system, which prevails in our days, as it did in those of old; the system of an intellectual world, a world of immaterial ideas and of spiritual natures. Neither is it liable to have such absurd notions and practices grafted upon it, as have been grafted on the other. The inconsistency of maintaining, like Pythagoras, that the human soul is a portion of the Deity, "particula divinæ auræ," and, at the same time, that there are other spiritual beings between God and man; or like St. Austin, that there is no mind existent between the human and the supreme mind, "nec ulla natura interposita," and, at the same time, that there are intelligences superior to man, and inferior to God; the inconsistency of these opinions, I say, is equal, and equally obvious. But on the other hand, to deny, that there is any affinity between the supreme and created intelligences is very consistent with this assumption, that the chain of intelligence

from man upwards, through many orders of created intellectual beings, is immeasurably long; though that uppermost link of this chain is not supposed to be fastened to the throne of infinite wisdom, nor to be nearer to it than the lowermost. Again: Since our planet is inhabited by corporeal intellectual beings, the hypothesis that assumes the other planets to be so likewise, is much more conceivable, than that of legions of angels, of demons and genii, and of pure and impure spirits, which pagan theology invented, and Jews and Christians adopted. Whether we suppose these beings immaterial, according to the present mode of opinion; or whether we suppose them, as the ancients both heathens and Christians did generally, to be fine material substances, like that whereof they made the human soul, or wherewith they thought proper to clothe it in its separate state, and of which Tully says in his Tusculans, "tanta ejus tenuitas, ut fugiat aciem;" whichever we suppose, this hypothesis stands on no other foundation, philosophically speaking, than that of a mere possible existence, of such spirits as are admitted for divers theological uses. The other hypothesis is founded on what we know of actual existence. We are led to it by a plain, direct, and unforced analogy. We know that there are habitations: and we assume that they are inhabited.

The first might appear plausible, as it did in those ages when poets and philosophers, as well as the vulgar, imagined that the Supreme Being who spoke, to use a common expression, and the universe was made, and every act whose will is sufficient to destroy it again, stood in need, like some earthly monarch, of ministers to attend his throne, of messengers to convey, and of troops to execute his orders: when they looked on the visible world, as on a great palace whose floor was the earth, and whose ceiling or upper story was the sky,* and when, in consequence of such fantastical notions, they supposed the upper story, or heaven, to be the habitation of gods, and of other celestial persons, as the lower story, or earth, was that of men. But it is time that these wild imaginations should have no longer any place in the first philosophy. As far as revelation realises and sanctifies them, they must be employed by the divine: and he has in revelation a sufficient authority for employing them. The philosopher, whose object is natural theology, has not the same, because the reality of such existences cannot be deduced from any knowledge he has of nature, and because he cannot be justified in going beyond the bounds which this knowledge prescribes. Faith and reason, revealed and natural knowledge, ought to be always distinguished; lest one should be confined, and the other

* Cujus cœlum laquear et terra pavimentum.

extended too much: and divines and philosophers should keep in their distinct provinces.

Thus they proceed, for the most part, in matters of natural philosophy. The modern philosophers, though very good Christians, communicate the wonderful discoveries that have been made in corporeal nature, and concerning the true system of the universe, without any regard to their repugnancy to the Mosaic history of the creation, and to almost all the notions of the sacred penmen, which were plainly those of an ignorant people and unphilosophical ages. When such of these philosophers, as are divines, endeavor to reconcile to philosophical truth these apparent contradictions to it, they do but shake the authority of the Scriptures, and show most evidently how necessary it is to keep theology and philosophy each on its proper bottom, and to avoid at least by comparing these different systems, to demonstrate that they are irreconcilable. St. Austin and others paid, as divines, no regard to cosmography, and flatly denied the antpiodes. The inquisitors at Rome denied that Galilei saw what he said he saw, and punished him very consequentially for saying that he saw it. Several divines follow the same method. They enter into cosmographical disquisitions no more than St. Austin, nor into astronomical any more than the Roman inquisitors, but content themselves to take the history of the creation according to the literal and obvious sense, as they find it related in the book of Genesis, and as they would take any other journal or historical relation. They who have done otherwise, and have found, upon trial, that this relation, thus understood, could not be reconciled to nature, reason, philosophy, nor natural theology, for natural theology teaches us to think of God in a manner very opposite to the ideas which Moses gives of the Supreme Being and of his operations, have made use of two expedients little favorable to the Mosaic history: for some have assumed it to be in this part wholly mythological, and others, unable to wrest natural philosophy into an agreement with it, have so wrested the text into a seeming agreement with their philosophical theories, as to make it plain that this text may be applied to any hypothesis, with some ingenuity, a skill in languages, and a knowledge of antiquity.———But I stop, here, a digression that might carry me insensibly a great way, and that was intended only to show, that since men have not admitted, in favor of revelation, a system of physics that is inconsistent with philosophical truth, there is no reason for admitting, in favor of the same revelation, a system of pneumatics, that is so too: whereas a hypothesis that has some foundations of probability in natural philosophy may be admitted, for this reason by the philosopher, and even by the divine for another reason; because it is not inconsistent with

revelation. If it be said that the pneumatical system, which establishes so many orders of spiritual beings, is not inconsistent with any knowledge that we have of nature; that it is properly a system, because it is established on revealed authority; and that if we consider it in a philosophical light alone, and merely as a hypothesis, it is better founded than the other; since we may assume, that there is a world of spirits from what we know of our own spirit by a more direct and easy analogy than that by which we assume, that the planets are inhabited by corporeal intelligent animals: if this be said, the answer is obvious and decisive. That there are such spiritual beings, as the authority of revelation is brought to prove, may not be inconsistent with some philosophical truths, but is so with others. Let it be, that any knowledge we have of natural philosophy does not contradict this system, yet is it suspicious to the first philosophy, because unecessary; and inconsistent with it, because the reasons for the generation, to speak like the heathen, or the creation, to speak like Jews and Christians, of this unnecessary world of spirits, the supposed manner of their existence, and the uses to which they are put, or suffered to put themselves, with a multitude of other circumstances, stand in opposition to several truths of the first philosophy or natural theology, and have served only to promote polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. These dogmas then, for if they are revealed they cease to be hypotheses, must be solely maintained on the authority of the Scriptures.

If the divine keeps on that ground, he cannot be defeated. He may own his inability to answer the objections, and to solve the difficulties opposed to him; or may refuse more prudently still to give any attention to philosophical reasoning, by urging, that a time will come, a time appointed of the father, when every knot will be untied, and every seeming repugnancy of reason to revelation will be reconciled: and that he is contented, as the philosopher ought to be, to wait for that time. The rabbi might defer his answer till Elias comes: the Christian till the Messias comes in his glory, and till the consummation of things. In the mean while, a sort of truce should take place between the divine and the philosopher. The former should forbear the vain attempt of bending reason to support revelation in this case, which is often done in many others, and almost always with notable prejudice to the latter. The philosopher should forbear to invade the province of the divine, on this condition; and should content himself to assert and promote natural theology, without opposing it to supernatural. Both of them might thus concur in receiving the hypothesis of planetary worlds, which does not require to be contrasted with the other, nor should have been so by me,

if I had not thought it necessary to show at the same time, that there are probably finite created intelligences vastly superior to the human, and that there is however no such gradation of intelligent beings, as raises the most elevated of them a jot nearer to the supreme intelligence than the lowest. I oppose this theological system, and I defend the philosophical hypothesis, the rather, because by these means we may combat the pride and presumption of metaphysicians in two most flagrant instances, in the assumption of a gradation of the same intelligence and knowledge from man to God, as I have said already, and in that by which man is made the final cause of the whole creation; for if the planets of our solar system are worlds inhabited like ours, and if the fixed stars are other suns about which other planets revolve, the celestial phenomena were no more made for us than we for them. That noble scene of the universe, which modern philosophy has opened, gives ample room for all the planetary inhabitants, whom it leads, and even constrains us to suppose. Where the spirits of the other system reside was a question easily answered, when superstition and hypothesis made up the sum of theology and philosophy. But it is not so easy to be answered now. Are the good and pure spirits in heaven? But where is heaven? Is it beyond all the solar systems of the universe? Or is it, like the intermundia of Epicurus, in expanses between them? Are the evil and impure spirits in hell? But where is hell? Is it in the centre of any one planet for every system? Or is it in the centre of every planet? Do others wander in air? or reside latent in every element? Are they confined invisibly, like those that the Chinese imagine, to certain countries and cities, to rivers and lakes, to woods and mountains? Or is it their employment to attend on particular men, the guardian angels, of some, or the devils and the tempters of others; for temptation is ascribed to the evil spirits still, though possession is so no longer, I think, out of Spain and Portugal, and other countries, where religious ignorance prevails as much as in them, if any such there are? ——Tantum——

ESSAY THE THIRD:

CONTAINING

SOME FURTHER REFLECTIONS

ON THE

RISE AND PROGRESS OF MONOTHEISM,

THAT FIRST AND GREAT PRINCIPLE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY, OR THE FIRST PHILOSOPHY.

SECTION I.

I HAD finished the last essay before I recollected, that there was something in Mr. Locke's discourse concerning the reasonableness of Christianity, very repugnant to what I have advanced about the knowledge of the one true God. And to what I shall have occasion to say, on another occasion, about the ignorance of natural religion, under which it is supposed that mankind labored before the coming of Christ. I shall not anticipate the second point, but shall bestow some more reflections on the first; in order to judge, whilst the subject is fresh in my mind, whether I ought to retract any thing that I have said to you in conversation, or that has fallen from my pen upon the subject. If it appears, on examination, that my notions are not so well sounded in fact, and in reason, as those of this great man in the present case, I shall submit with pleasure to an authority, that I respect extremely in all cases; and if it appears that they are better founded than his in both, one useful lesson will be the result of this examination. We shall learn how unsafe it is to take for granted any thing, in matters especially which concern, or which

are thought to concern, religion, that we have not ourselves examined, and how inexcusable it is to do this in cases wherein we may be able, with a little pains, to judge for ourselves.

The first article of natural theology, in which the heathen were deficient, according to Mr. Locke, was the knowledge of one God, maker of all things. He admits, at the same time, that the works of nature, in every part of them, sufficiently evidenced a deity; and that, by the impressions of himself, God was easy to be found. These assertions do not seem very consistent, and therefore it is added, that the world made so little use of their reason, that they saw him not—sense and lust blinded their minds. But the rational and thinking part of mankind, he confesses, found the one Supreme, invisible God, when they sought after him. If this be true now, as it is most certainly, the heathen world made as good use of their reason, for aught I can see, as the Christian world. In this, it is not the irrational and unthinking, but the rational and thinking part of mankind who seek, and find the true God; and just so we are told, that it was in the other. Besides, if this be true, it follows, that this great and fundamental article of natural theology is discoverable by a due use of human reason; and Mr. Locke acknowledges accordingly again, that God, was found by the wise and virtuous, which is a limitation of no great significancy to his purpose, since the vicious would have sought him in no state of mankind, nor the foolish have found him. But says this writer, the wise and virtuous had never authority enough to prevail on the multitude, and to persuade the societies of men, that there was but one God. If he had proved, as well as affirmed this, he would only have proved, what no man denies, that sufficient means to reclaim men from polytheism and idolatry, and to establish the belief of one God, appear to have been wanting in general, and to a great degree, as far as the memorials we have of ancient nations can show. He would not have proved, that the light of nature was insufficient, nor that the religion of nature was defective in this respect. He would not have proved, what he had in view to establish, that the belief and worship of one God was the national religion of the Israelites alone, and that it was their particular privilege, and advantage, to know the true God and the true worship of him; whilst all other nations, from the beginning, adored the host of heaven, as Eusebius asserts very confidently, though he is far from proving it.

Eusebius took much pains, and used much art, I might say artifice, to spread an opinion that this knowledge, and all good theology were derived from the Jews, and from their Scriptures; nay that the philology and philosophy of the whole learned world were purloined from thence, and the heathen were pla-

giaries, who lighted their candles at the fire of the sanctuary, as some modern Eusebius or other, Gale, I think, expresses himself. Josephus had gone before Eusebius in the same design: for thus far Jews and Christians made their cause common, and he had begun to falsify chronology, that he might give his nation a surprising antiquity. Eusebius did the same, and without taking the trouble of descending into particulars, many of which are acknowledged by learned and orthodox writers, I may say, that from that time to this, or to the time when by the revival of letters, and the invention of printing, which made the knowledge of antiquity more easy and common, much the same practice was continued with much the same success. Ancient memorials have been forged and altered for this particular purpose, mere assumptions have been delivered as facts, and nothing has been neglected to give not only antiquity, but illustration, to a nation that never had much of the latter out of their own writings, and those of Christianity. As the history of the Jews was committed to the care of their scribes; so the propagation of every learned system that could tend to the confirmation of it, by reconciling anachronisms, and by coloring improbabilities, has been the charge of a particular order of men among Christians, who had the monopoly of learning for many ages, and who have had a great share of it since. This has been imposed on the bulk of mankind, prepared by their prejudices to acquiesce under the authority of great names, and frightened from examining by the enormous piles of Greek, and Latin, and eastern languages, in which such authors seem to entrench themselves.

Notwithstanding this, I will say, and, if I know any thing, I say it on knowledge, that these entrenchments are not tenable. They cannot be battered down always, perhaps, by the same arms by which they are defended, but sure I am they may be undermined, and he who searches their foundations will find that they are laid on sand. Josephus and Eusebius will be of great use to him, against themselves. Their writings are repertories of valuable fragments, and of such as would be more so, if more credit could be given to the fidelity of those who cite them. I have sometimes thought, that we might apply properly enough to the Jew, and the Christian author, what La Bruyere says, in his characters, of Perault, that he quoted so many passages from ancient writers, whilst he attempted to prove the superiority of the moderns, that his works were read for the sake of these passages.

Thinking in this manner, I could not fail to be surprised when I found such assertions, as are mentioned above, in a treatise written by Mr. Locke. The common herd of writers copy one another in every point that makes for their common cause, about

which alone, and not about truth, they seem to be concerned.—They affirm over and over so positively, and so long, things destitute of proof, or evident falsities, that even the last grow into belief, according to the practice of the court of Rome, as father Paul represents it, in her usurpations. I should not have easily suspected Mr. Locke of such a proceeding, nor of affirming dogmatically what he had not sufficiently examined. But he has written below himself in this instance, by going out of his way, and has assumed the spirit of those who write on the same subject, much like Sir Isaac Newton, who lost himself in the vague probabilities of chronology, after having pursued with so much success the certainty of mathematical demonstration.

I meddle not here with any thing that is said concerning that clear knowledge of their duty, which was wanting to mankind, as Mr. Locke affirms very untruly, before the coming of Christ, nor with the theological part of this treatise. I confine myself to these propositions, that all the heathen were in a state of darkness, and ignorance of the true God, and consequently that the belief and worship of one God was the national religion of the Israelites alone. Now here I observe a want of that precision, which this great man is so careful to keep in all his other writings. As he does not distinguish enough the want of a sufficient knowledge of natural religion, and the want of sufficient means to propagate it, which he rather confounds in all he says about them, so he uses these two expressions, the true God, and one God, as if they were exactly synonymous; whereas they are not really so, and the explanation, and justification of the distinction, in the present dispute, will set the matter on a very different foot. It is not unity alone that constitutes the complex idea, or notion of the true God. There is, there can be but one such Being, and yet a monotheist may be as far from the knowledge of the true God as the rankest, and most superstitious polytheist. I have taken notice, in the precedent essay, how the belief of one God, and of many, was reconciled in the heathen theology several ways; and what I have touched transiently, may be seen made out fully in the intellectual system. A polytheist, who believes one self-existent Being, the fountain of all existence, by whose immediate or communicated energy all things were made, and are governed, and who looks on all those other beings whom he calls gods, that is, beings superior to man, not only as inferior to the Supreme, but as beings all of whom proceed from him in several subordinate ranks, and are appointed by him to the various uses and services for which he designed them in the whole extent of the divine economy; such a polytheist, I say, will approach nearly to true theism, by holding in this manner nothing that is absolutely inconsistent with it: whilst

the monotheist, who believes that there is but one God, and ascribes to this God, whom he should conceive as an all-perfect Being, the very worst of human imperfections, is most certainly ignorant of the true God, and as opposite to true theism as the atheist, nay he is more injuriously so. Mr. Locke would have done like himself, if he had made these reflections before he had joined in the common cry; and he might have thought, perhaps, in that case, that the coming of Christ was necessary to give the Jews true notions of God, as well as to convince the Gentiles of his unity.

Instead of this, he takes the common opinion for granted, supposes what is in question, and does not so much as attempt a proof. He says indeed, that "there was no part of mankind ——— that had a greater light of reason, or that followed it farther in all sorts of speculations, than the Athenians; and yet we find," he adds, "but one Socrates amongst them that opposed and laughed at their polytheism ——— and we see how they rewarded him for it." He quotes in the same place the reproach that St. Paul made to this people. "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious, for as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." If these were meant for proofs of what he asserts, they were unluckily chosen. Matter of fact is mistaken in one, and in neither of them is there the least color of argument. Socrates was so far from opposing the religious worship established at Athens, that he held it to be the duty of every citizen to follow the religion established by the laws of his city, as we know upon good authority, that of Xenophon; and if we turn to the Euthypro in Plato, we shall find him declaring, in his zeal for polytheism, against all the traditions which he judged to be unworthy of the gods, though they were believed and respected by the vulgar. This was his crime. He neither opposed, nor laughed at polytheism, though he certainly believed the unity of the Supreme Being. But the zeal of bigots in those days, as in ours, made it no less criminal to reject the abuses of religion, than to profess atheism; and a faction in the state took advantage of this, to put him to death.

But if we suppose, for argument sake, that he was put to death for opposing and laughing at polytheism, and idolatry; if the Athenians were superstitious, as they were undoubtedly, and if they dedicated an altar to the unknown God, what will all this serve to prove? It will only prove that men are apt, and even the most judicious, sometimes, to erect their scanty knowledge of a few particulars into a supposed general, and certain knowledge of any subject. A little tract of land passes with them for the whole world, two or three nations for all mankind,

and two or three thousand years for all antiquity. Are we able to compare the Athenians very exactly in this respect, or in any other, with the people who flourished at the same time, and of whom we have some accounts in history and tradition? How much less are we able to compare them with so many other nations, of whom not so much as the names are come down to us, or were known to them? What argument then can be drawn from the polytheism, idolatry and superstition of this little state, to that of the whole world, which is the point to be proved? or from the Athenians in the days of Socrates, or St. Paul, even to the Athenians themselves in the ages whereof the priests of Sais talked to Solon: nay, to the whole race of mankind in these, and still more ancient ages; for even these were not deemed the first?

I might leave the argument here, since the author of the reasonableness of Christianity offers no other proofs of the facts he advances. But I think myself obliged to justify my opinion, so contrary to his, and to that of the whole crowd of scholars, on whose authority he rests. Great men take great liberties, and expect to be believed on their words, and the disciples of Mr. Locke have as good a right, as the disciples of any philosopher, to use the ἀυτὸς ἔφη. But for me, who cannot allow it to any in matters which I am able to examine, and who should think myself obliged to give my reasons even for agreeing with him in all such matters, it seems still more incumbent upon me to give those which induce me to differ from him; and I shall do so, without repeating much of what has been said by me already.

I have said in the former essay, and I have given my reasons for it, that I do not believe mankind discerned the unity of God in the first dawnings of knowledge. But the impressions of the Creator are so strongly marked in the whole extent of the creation, and the idea of an all-wise, and all-powerful Being, first cause of all things, is so proportionable to human reason, that it must have been received into the minds of men as soon as they began to contemplate the face of nature, and to exercise their reason in such contemplations; and this was long before the commencement of any tradition that we find out of the books of Moses. Profane memorials show us the whole world, and sacred memorials except the patriarchs, and the Israelites alone out of this dark scene, involved in polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. But still both sacred and profane concur in showing us some gleams of light that break through these clouds, some notices of the knowledge and worship of the true God, that were kept up among the sons of men. They appear faintly, and very imperfect they were in these times, perhaps early to us, though late with respect to the beginning of our mundane,

and human system. But still they appear, and give us sufficient reason to collect from their appearances, much more than they show us immediately.

It is strange to observe how unwilling ecclesiastical writers and divines are to admit this truth; and it is often provoking to observe that they, who have no more pretence to be believed about their own religion, than the heathen writers about theirs, presume to contradict what the latter of these affirm about their faith, in opposition to the invectives of Christian writers, though they appeal to the ancient doctors of paganism whom they do not appear to have interpolated, nor under whose names there is no pretence to say that they have imposed any spurious books on the world; both which accusations are evidently true of our Christian writers in the first, and, as we commonly say, the purest ages of Christianity. It is stranger still to observe how little regard the same persons pay, upon this head, even to the opinions of the greatest saints, and most learned men of their own church. I could quote many instances. Let one suffice. It shall be taken from St. Austin, who answering a passage of Faustus the Manichæan,* wherein he makes the belief of one Supreme Being the common badge of pagans, Jews, and Christians, does not allow indeed that the Christians took the opinion of a divine monarchy from the heathens, but is forced to allow that these were not so given up to false gods, as to lose the belief of the one true God, from whom every kind of nature proceeds.†

The polytheism, superstition, and idolatry of Egypt appear so monstrous in the light in which we view them, that they furnish the principal topics of every declamation against the theology of paganism; and yet I persuade myself, that the knowledge and worship of God in his unity, had prevailed even there in times unknown to us. Let it be considered that the Greeks, through whom all our profane anecdotes concerning this country have been conveyed, were not much acquainted with it, nor had resorted to it in search of knowledge till the reign of Psammitichus, that is, till seventeen or eighteen centuries after the establishment of this monarchy, dating this establishment only from Menes, and bringing him down as low as he is dragged by Marsham. Thales, Solon, and Pythagoras went thither nearly about the same time, in the reign of Crœsus at soonest; or in that of Cambyses at latest. By this chronology it appears, that an immense space of time, sufficient for many revolutions in religion and government, was elapsed before the

* Lib. 20.

† ——Gentes non usque adeo ad falsos deos esse dilapsas, ut opinionem amitterent unius veri Dei, ex quo est omnis qualiscunque natura.

Greeks had the means of being well informed about either; and the antiquities of Egypt might be as obscurely and imperfectly seen by these first philosophers, who went thither, as the Greek antiquities are by us. We may push this consideration farther, and suppose that the same polytheism, superstition, and idolatry that they found established in Egypt, were established there in the time of Orpheus, six or seven hundred years before, or even in the time of Cecrops, Cadmus, Danaus, or Erectheus, who are said to have carried colonies, letters, and civil institutions into Greece two or three hundred years sooner than Orpheus carried religious rites and mysteries thither: and there will remain still behind all these events, an antiquity more than sufficient for one revolution in theological opinions, and in religious worship at least, and perhaps for more than one.

I am willing to grant more than Eusebius, or any one else has proved, and yet this concession will only thrust the era of Egyptian polytheism and idolatry back into a greater antiquity. It will not give any grounds to assert, like Eusebius, that the Egyptians were polytheists, and idolaters, or professed a sort of religious atheism from the beginning, nor that the Israelites alone knew, and worshipped the true God. It may lead us perhaps to opinions very opposite to these, and much better founded on profane, for I shall not yet consider the sacred authority that is alleged for them, and that is more so in appearance than in reality. The more ancient the establishment of polytheism and idolatry in Egypt is agreed to have been, the stronger the argument grows, that may be drawn from those notices that we have in our most authentic accounts of Egyptian theology, of a purer faith and worship. The belief of one Supreme, invisible, and incomprehensible Being, Creator of all things, must have been once firmly settled in the minds of that people, when so many ages of prevalent polytheism and idolatry were not able to root it out, nor to efface the traces of the worship of him. Public profession, and practice, the outward system of religion, was altered, and the purity of it corrupted many ways, and by different motives. But nothing except conviction could have preserved, from time immemorial, in the secret theology, or inward doctrine of the Egyptians, this fundamental article of all true religion, the existence of one Supreme Being, Creator, and Monarch of the universe, and this article was so preserved. Whatever errors the Egyptians, or their scholars the Greeks, admitted into their theology, this opinion tinctured every theistical system: and even they who held the world to be eternal, like Aristotle and others, held the world, and the deified parts of it to be so, not as self-existent, but as eternal effects of an eternal cause. Aristotle argues in his metaphysics against the folly of supposing more

principles than one, and nothing can be more express than the doctrine of Plotinus on this point, where he distinguishes between priority in the order of time, and priority in the order of nature, and makes the world coeval with God no otherwise, than as light is conceived to be coeval with the sun.

The belief of one Supreme Being may appear the more evidently to have been that of the Egyptians, publicly professed in the most ancient times of that monarchy, and held at all times in their secret theology, from this consideration, that it was brought from thence by the first of the Greeks, who went thither for instructions, and that the same doctrine was held by the last of those who had studied this philosophy. Thales, and Pythagoras, to say nothing of Plato here, who came long after, brought it into Greece, disguised indeed under hieroglyphical and mystical representations, but yet too plainly taught to be mistaken for the contrary doctrine. Anaxagoras made a more public use of it by his writings, and has gone away with the honor of being the first of the Greeks who introduced a nous, or mind, into the cosmopœia. But Thales was of the same opinion as Anaxagoras, and Eusebius quotes very unfairly what this philosopher said of water, as of the first principle of all things, without making any mention of that intelligence who framed all things of water according to Thales.* This notion of a fluid chaos, which we know to have been very general, by Plutarch and by other authorities, was very Mosaical too, and points up to an Egyptian original. The founder of the Ionic sect had it from thence most certainly, and Moses too, if we give any credit to Simplicius, who scrupled not to declare, as I find him quoted by Dr. Cudworth, that the passages in the first of Genesis about the creation of the world were taken from Egyptian traditions. He called them fabulous, because he was a zealous asserter of the eternity of the world. But his authority will not make them pass for such. Moses, who had been instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, might believe them true upon much better grounds. Nay more, he might be directed, if you please, by inspiration to take from them his belief of the beginning of things. Upon the whole, it is plain that the Supreme Being, the maker of the world, was acknowledged by the Egyptian theology at the first period that has been mentioned.

To prove that the same doctrine was derived from the same source, by the last of those who applied themselves to the study of Egyptian theology, I shall content myself to bring Jamblicus forward; a very mysterious writer indeed, and yet plain enough to establish what we contend for. He answers the questions

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

Porphyry had asked of Anebo, under the name of Abammon the master of Anebo. He was a Syrian, a very learned man, and much more capable, probably, than any Egyptian of that age to give a body of their divinity. Now we learn by the eighth section of the book he wrote on this occasion, that the Egyptian philosophy supposed a multitude of essences, as they expressed themselves, and a multitude of different principles of these essences, from whence I am apt to think, that Pythagoras borrowed his numbers, and Plato his ideas. They carried their inquiries beyond all the bounds of human knowledge, and they disputed, as we do now, about words. But still it is manifest that these essences, or principles, were deemed subordinate to the first cause; for before them all, and before the first god and king the sun, they acknowledged a Being, the fountain of all Being the root of all intelligible ideas. From this Being proceeded, according to this theology, "explicuit se" in Gale's translation, that Being who is his own father, sufficient to himself, the God of gods, the father of essences from whom all existence flows. This was the doctrine which Mercurius Trismegistus taught, and these were the principles he placed before the etherial, empyreal, and celestial deities, concerning whom he wrote a great number of volumes. That this is a rhapsody of nonsense, I agree most readily. But it may not be less genuine for that, and it is sufficient for my purpose; since it establishes the unity of God even more precisely, and less mysteriously than the Athanasian creed.

That Greek metaphysical refinements helped to render the Egyptian theology less intelligible, I shall not controvert; though he must pass for a dogmatical pedant, who presumes to affirm, that they did so, and pretends to be a competent judge of the matter. But sure I am, that the orthodoxy of it, in this great point, is better proved by this quotation from Jamblicus, than the supposed monstrous heterodoxy of it by any authority Eusebius brings to justify his charge. He affirms very positively, in the third book of his evangelical preparation, that no other gods, besides the stars, were acknowledged even in the hidden theology of the Egyptians: that the creation of the universe was ascribed to the visible sun alone, and all things depended, according to it, on fatal necessity, and on the influence of the stars, without the intervention of any incorporeal being, any efficient reason, God, gods, or invisible intelligent natures. To maintain this stout assertion, he quotes a fragment of Porphyry's letter to Anebo, and triumphs much in it, though it makes nothing to his purpose. It proves that Chæremon, and some other writers had induced Porphyry to doubt concerning this article of the Egyptian creed, and that he wrote to his priest to be informed of the

truth. Chæremon was an Egyptian, and had been a priest, as Anebo was; for neither the comic poet, nor any other of that name, can be the person intended, as it seems to me. Porphyry might possibly know nothing more of him. His authority, therefore, appeared sufficient to make Porphyry inquire. But it was not sufficient to make Eusebius affirm, in flat contradiction to so many better authorities, and even to his own in other places. This Chæremon, I believe, was he who had accompanied Ælius Gallus in his voyage from Alexandria higher up into Egypt, and had been derided for his ignorance and arrogance by the whole company. Strabo had been one of this company, and Eusebius had read the seventeenth book of his geography, without doubt, wherein an account is given of this important person. It is shameful, therefore, to see him quoted for the true notions of Egyptian theology. There were some philosophers and learned men in Egypt, very probably, in the time of Chæremon. But the colleges of those ancient philosophers, under whom Eudoxus and Plato had studied, were desert; or if they remained, they were become seminaries of priests, who took care of sacrifices, performed the other rites of superstition, exercised all the craft of their order, and took no pains to improve themselves and others in knowledge. Eusebius should have remembered, that if Chæremon's authority was good against the Egyptians, it was of some force and weight against the Jews, which he would have been as unwilling to admit as Josephus, who accused Chæremon for this reason of imposture, unless he had avowed in this case a maxim, which he and Josephus have done little else than avow in others, that the same testimony is good when it makes for them, and bad when it makes against them. Eusebius should have remembered, when he derided the comment of Porphyry on the verses attributed to Orpheus, and when he asked how the author, whoever he was, could sing of God, or mean that efficient mind that created the universe, who had never heard of any such doctrine? He should have remembered, I say, that he begged the question, and supposed what he had not proved against the pagans.

It has been observed already, that the unity of a Supreme Being must have been once a first principle of Egyptian religion, since it pierced through such an immense series of polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. Here we may observe to the same purpose, that all the metaphysical and theological refinements of Egypt and Greece, were not able to remove this angular stone of true theism. When metaphysics and theology are made sciences, and these sciences become the professions of orders of men, who increase their consideration in the world, or advance their temporal interests by creating an appearance of mystery

where there is none, or by increasing it where it is, the simplicity of religion will be lost of course, and natural theology will be transformed into artificial. We may find examples to confirm this truth in the Christian system, and I much doubt whether the evangelists would understand the epistles of St. Paul, though one of them was his scribe, or St. Paul the works of St. Austin, though the saint took so much of his theology from the apostle. This happened in the Egyptian system of religion; but this fundamental article, the unity of God, was preserved, though darkened and perplexed by the engraftments made upon it. Such were those which may be found in Plato, and in the latter Platonicians; such were those which I have, and others which I might have cited from Jamblicus. But in all of them the existence of a Supreme Being, the Being of beings, the God of gods, the fountain of all existence, the root of all intelligible ideas, was acknowledged.

May one not think, without being too hypothetical, that we see in the anecdote Plutarch* relates concerning the belief and worship of the people of the Theban dynasty, the last stage of orthodox faith, and of natural religion in Egypt? They adored the one God eternal, invisible, not like to any visible objects, nor to be represented by them. I use Mr. Locke's words, for if he had intended to describe this faith and worship from Plutarch, he could not have done it more exactly, and yet this is the description of that God who was not known, according to him, till the light of the gospel manifested him to the world. He might have asserted just as truly, that no men but the Jews knew how to read and write, before the coming of Christ, because many of them knew it ill, as they do to this day, and some of them did not know it at all.

At what time the true God was thus publicly known and worshipped in the Upper Egypt, it is impossible to determine. But we see in the history ascribed to Moses, that he was known in the Lower Egypt, and the neighboring country of the Chanaanites in the days of Abraham. The adventures of this patriarch and his son, when their wives were taken from them, are told in several chapters of Genesis a little confusedly, but however they serve to establish this fact. No man, who reads the twentieth chapter of Genesis, can doubt, whether it was the true God, or not, of whom the author meant to speak, and who appeared to the first of the Abimelechs in his sleep. It has been said, I know, on this occasion, that God manifested himself sometimes to those who were not in his alliance, or covenant, but that he did this always for the sake of his own people. He did it then, at this

* De Iside et Osiride.

time to preserve Sarah's chastity. Be it so. But still be manifested himself on this important occasion. The king of Gerar knows him, and appeals to his justice. God is pleased to declare that the king's intentions were not criminal, and that he had therefore kept him from the commission of the sin, a very unnecessary restraint, surely, since the king did not intend to commit it, since his intentions were not criminal. God commands, the king obeys, Abraham intercedes, and Abimelech is restored to the power of begetting, and his wife and his concubines to the power of conceiving children. The same, or which is more likely, some other Abimelech had taken warning, and therefore as soon as he knew that Rebecca was the wife of Isaac, he threatened death to any man, who should presume to lie with her, and bring so great a sin on him, and his people. He followed Isaac to Bersabea, and there this king, his minister, and his general desired to make a solemn league with him, because they knew that the Lord was with him.* The reason they gave, to induce him to consent, was not only that they had done no hurt to him, nor his, but that they had sent him from Gerar, with the blessing of the Lord.† Is the true God pointed more directly out any where in the same book? Do not the Abimelechs acknowledge him, and conduct themselves, on this occasion, as one of the patriarchs might have done.

Melchisedech must not be forgotten in this place. A thousand idle guesses have been made, and various fables invented about him. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, shows great cabalistical skill on this subject, and grounds on such forced allusions as might pass in the school of Gamaliel, the least conclusive reasoning that was ever heard out of it. The book of Genesis says little of this king and priest, but enough to show, that the true God was known to others besides the Jewish line of patriarchs, and before the Israelites were a people. He was of Egyptian race, as some have asserted without any grounds, I believe, of history or tradition, but not without an air at least of probability. In all cases, he was priest of the most high God, as well as king of Salem. As such he blessed Abraham; as such the father of the faithful received his blessing; as such he paid him the tithes of his plunder, which is a title, by the way, for carrying the divine right of tithes farther than the moderation of the church has hitherto carried it.‡ Since he was a priest of the true God, as well as king of Salem, or Jerusalem, are we to be-

*Tecum esse Dominum.

†Dimisimus auctum benedictione Domini.—Gen. vi, 26.

‡What is here said, is said on the authority of St. Paul; for if we believe Moses, it may be that Melchisedech paid tithes to Abraham.

lieve that his subjects were all idolaters? The supposition cannot be reconciled to common sense; and since it cannot, sure I am that the propositions I combat cannot be so, nay I have the authority of the Bible on my side. I shall have it so again before I have done.

If I would proceed now, as learned men presume to do very frequently, and without the least scruple, I might venture to affirm, on these foundations a little extended and improved, not only that the true God was known by the Egyptians and by some of the people of Palestine before the vocation of Abraham, but that this patriarch, who became the father of the faithful, though said to have been bred an idolater, learned this orthodox faith in Egypt and the neighboring countries, if he was so bred in his own. But I am not scholar enough to presume to affirm on wild conjecture. I dare go no farther than sufficient probability leads me, and sufficient vouchers support me. With these on my side, I might go on to show, that the unity of a Supreme God was taught both by the Chaldeans, and the Magi, and might rest on the proofs brought by Cudworth in his intellectual system, by Hide in his treatise concerning the religion of the ancient Persians, and by other authors, leaving critics, who are not able to subvert the systems of these writers, to nibble at some particular circumstances. But I choose to leap at once to the extremity of the East, and to show by anecdotes less common, that a nation lately known, had, in as great, or even a greater antiquity, the same faith.

The nation I mean is the Chinese, who will not be suspected, one would think, of having had any communication with the Israelites, though I would not answer for such antiquaries as Huetius, nor others of that stamp. The Chinese have their Pentateuch as well as the Jews, and one volume of it is as old as Fohi the founder of their empire. Two other volumes contain records as old at least as the deluge, and the two last are collections from other ancient monuments published by Confucius, who lived six hundred years before Christ, and was therefore older than Esdras. The Chinese scholars, as proud of the antiquity of their nation as ever any of those who disputed formerly about theirs could be, might disregard our most ancient traditions, and look on Moses as a modern historian. They might found their incredulity on their credulity, and their positiveness on their ignorance; which is the general case of bigots in the West as well as in the East. But for us, who have the happiness to live in this enlightened age, and who pretend to examine every thing, and to judge according to evidence, we should have no good grace to reject the classical books of the Chinese. They come to us upon as good original authority as

that of the Jews, they contain as few things that are repugnant to the general observation and experience of mankind as any other ancient records, and much fewer than some; and they have been preserved in a manner that gives them a singular authenticity, into which I will not enter, because it would lead me far, and might cause some invidious comparisons.*

This authenticity is so well established, that the atheists in China are forced to submit to it, and though their advantage would be to reject these books, they endeavor, by all the artifice of sophistry, to drag a meaning out of them, which may seem to set the opinion of antiquity on their side. The ancient sages among the Chinese, like those of other nations, delivered their doctrines in short apophthegms, in parables and allegories. They who followed were not so laconic, but even they dealt much in figure; and allegory allegorising allegory very often by way of explanation, the sense, which was at first obscure, grew to be worse than obscure. It grew to be litigious. The paraphrases and commentaries multiplied, the disputes increased, and the labor on every side has been to confirm different and opposite opinions, by different expositions of the same text. The language, as well as genius, of this people has helped to increase the confusion, not so much indeed as if these books had passed through several languages, but still a great deal from the scarcity of words, and the necessity of supplying this defect, when they speak by numberless inflections and tones of voice, and when they write by numberless points and accents.

A Jesuit, who restored the mission in the last century, after it had been some time interrupted by the authority of the government, took a method which it is to the present purpose to mention. He engaged in the dispute that was carried on between the theists and the atheists, and maintained in concert with the former, that the ancient Chinese believed and worshipped one God. This God, the God of their fathers, denied by some, forgotten by more, and almost unknown, he declared to be the God whose revelation, and whose will he came to publish among them. Neither he, nor those who followed him have made many real converts to Christianity, nor persuaded that people to believe that his religion was in former times established amongst them, though many pious frauds have been employed for that purpose. But in the other part, there has been less difficulty, and more success, for the state of the dispute seems to have stood thus.

A being called Xam Ti, which words signify the Supreme King, appears in all their ancient books to have been worshipped as the dispenser of temporal good and evil to mankind. Fohi

* Vid. Scien. Sin. &c.

offered victims, and Hoam Ti built a temple to this divinity.—From this time, that is from an era anterior to any of ours, the same worship continued, together with religious rites practised in honor of inferior spirits,* who are sometimes called the ministers of the Supreme King, and who are said by one of the interpreters of Confucius, to exercise their offices "in hoc cœli et terræ medio," to bring blessings on the good, and punishments on the wicked. The book Xu Kim says expressly, that their great emperor and legislator Xun sacrificed to Xam Ti, and to the six principal spirits. Another classical book mentions a very ancient edict, by which all the people are commanded to pay honor to the Supreme Emperor of heaven, and likewise to the spirits, that the spirits may intercede for the happiness of the people, "ut pro populo flagitarent felicitatem." Such passages, and a multitude of others to the like effect, are found in the ancient books of the Chinese, as we learn from the Jesuits, from whom alone we can have any tolerable information, and it should seem that such authorities were sufficient to decide the controversy, and to leave no doubt whether the ancient people of this country believed a God, or were atheists. But the men of letters among them at this time profess a sort of Spinozism, to which they endeavor to reconcile these passages, and there are many examples in the "Scientia Sinica" of the extravagant paraphrases they make for this purpose.

The atheists insist, and the theists admit, that the word Tien, which signifies heaven, is frequently used now, and was so anciently, as synonymous to the words Xam Ti. What the atheists would infer from thence is obvious, but by no means conclusive. Their forefathers imagined, as I believe that all the ancient people of the world did, and as almost all the people of the world do still, that the habitation of God, and all celestial beings, was above that canopy which appeared to be spread over their heads, and which they called heaven. From hence the custom arose of employing the word which signifies the place of residence, for the word that denotes the Being who is supposed to reside in it. But the argument that results from the promiscuous use of these words, will turn, according to my apprehension, directly against the use which the atheist would make of it. If the ancient Chinese had acknowledged no higher principle than matter and form, no supreme intelligent Being, the words Xam Ti, far from being used as synonymous to the word Tien, would never have come into use at all. A man who should say at Pekin, China declared war against the Tartars, or the Emperor of China did so, would speak as intelligibly as a man at London would do,

* Vid. Confucius.

who should say Great Britain, or the King of Great Britain, declared war against France. But the same manner of speaking cannot obtain in a country that has neither emperor, nor king; and no Dutchman ever said indifferently this Holland did, or this the King of Holland did. This argument must be the stronger in the mouths of Chinese theists; because in the same books, wherein the words we have mentioned are thus used, the separate existence of the spirits of mountains, rivers, and cities, and of the seasons, the sun, the moon, and the planets is taught: and yet these separate spirits, and the things over which they preside, are spoken of in the same license. They are called indifferently the spirit of the mountain, or of the river, and the mountain or the river; nay, the very same words that are employed to signify the fortifications of a city, are employed to signify the tutelary spirits of that city. On the whole we may conclude, that a Supreme Being was known to the ancient Chinese, though superstition, idolatry, and atheism have been so prevalent among that people since. The sacrifices performed with so much order and pomp, so much reverence and religious awe, the fasts, the purifications, and the other acts of divine worship which were practised, were not performed and practised surely in honor of matter and form, nor directed to these vague ideas of the human mind. The empresses who nourished silk worms, and wove ornaments for the altars; the emperors who ploughed and sowed annually, and raised by the sweat of their brows the fruits of the earth, which they offered on those altars, acknowledged without doubt some other divinity than Tai Kie, and Li. Thus we must think, unless we can be as absurd as Eusebius, and figure to ourselves a sort of religious atheists, who, acknowledging no deity besides dead and senseless matter, yet worshipped it, invoked it, and implored its assistance. But this sottishness and contradictious nonsense, Cudworth cannot believe incident to human nature,* and I presume to think that most men will be of the same mind.

SECTION II.

The particular proofs that have been brought, or to which I have referred in this, and the foregoing essay, are sufficient to destroy the credit of the assertions to which they are opposed. But it may be proper to show farther, that if there were no such particular proofs of the acknowledgement of the one true God by other nations besides the Israelites, yet the assumption that

* Intell. System.

he was acknowledged by them alone, and that all other nations were polytheists and idolators, from the beginning, would deserve to be rejected for its absurdity; since it will be found inconsistent with the tenor of the Mosaical history, when we take Scripture for our guide, and with all the rules of judgment that observation, experience, and good sense suggest to us, when we consider the human character, and the course of human affairs. I am not surprised when I meet in Bochart with such an assertion as this boldly advanced, that "there was no church before the deluge except in the family of Seth," and that after the deluge, "till the coming of Christ, God made himself known to no people except to those who were of the race of Sem."* But when I meet with such assertions as I have quoted from Mr. Locke, in an author who lays aside the comments and systems of divines, and betakes himself to the sole reading of the Scriptures, I confess myself surprised, to the last degree, at the weakness of the strongest minds.

We have nothing to do here with the antediluvian world. We leave the ecclesiastical history of it to Bochart, and the natural to Burnet. But if we consult the Bible for what passed after the deluge, and is to our present purpose, we shall find that the knowledge of the one true God, derived to Noah from Adam by uninterrupted succession, and confirmed to him by many particular revelations, must have been common to him, and to his family, as much as those particular precepts which he is said to have received from the mouth of God, and which are called "præcepta Noachidarum." The sons of Noah, therefore, when they dispersed themselves to repeople the world, must have carried this knowledge with them, and have communicated it to their descendants, in all the settlements they made, and in all the colonies that were propagated from these.

This is so evident that it would suffer no dispute in any similar case: and yet for reasons not hard to find, nor proper to avow, it is denied in this. Lactantius says,† that Ham the son of Noah settled in Arabia, and that having not received the worship of God by tradition from his father, the nation he founded was the first that knew not God. A strange assertion indeed, and such an one as cannot be true, if the Sacred History be so. We read there,‡ that the patriarch lying drunk and naked in his tent, and this ungracious son seeing him in that indecent condition, he told it to his brothers; that Sem and Japhet went reverently backwards, saw not their father's nudity, and threw a cloak over him.§ After this Noah pronounced the prophe-

* Geog. Sac. l. i, c. i.
† De Orig. Er. c. 4.
‡ Gen. ix.
§ —— Patris virilia non videntur.

tical curse against Canaan, the son of Ham, who was to be the servant of the servants of his brothers;* and this prophecy, it is said by Bochart and others, had its completion when the Canaanites were subdued by the Israelites. But whatever criticisms good or bad may be made on it, and whatever reflection the punishment of Canaan, who had no share in his father's crime, may suggest, this gave the Israelites the sole title they had to the land of promise by the grant God made of it to the posterity of Abraham, and was employed to justify all the cruelties they exercised on the Canaanites.

This unfortunate person was not only punished in his race, as the prophecy threatened, but his name and memory are cruelly persecuted to this day by the unrelenting wrath of Jewish and Christian writers. Some have accused him of gelding his father, and some of committing incest with his mother. He was banished, they say, to the scorching climate of Africa, and the color of his posterity is a lasting monument of the blackness of his crimes. He not only preserved and propagated the necromancy which he had learned of the lascivious angels before the deluge,† but he became himself an object of idolatry, as he had been an idolater, and was worshipped under the name of Jupiter Hammon. They who can believe all this, may believe that polytheism and idolatry were established immediately after the deluge. But they, who are not quite so credulous, will see that such opinions are irreconcileable to the Scriptures, and to common sense. Noah might be as angry as he pleased with his reprobate son, and might conceal from him as many traditions as he could, yet still this son had been an eye-witness of the deluge, he had been saved with the rest of the family in the ark, he had assisted his father without doubt in building it, and in making all the other preparations for that great catastrophe, as well as for the renewal of the species of animals, and the restoration of things afterwards. Is it possible to conceive, that he should not have heard, whilst they floated together over the drowned world, who that God was by whose power it was drowned, and what those crimes were which had drawn this astonishing destruction on mankind? It is impossible. His father could not conceal this knowledge from him. Ham knew the one true God most certainly, and had often joined in the worship of him. He could no more be ignorant of God than he could be of the deluge.

This is so very plain, that it cannot be directly, nor generally denied, whatever expressions may be sometimes used by men

* —— Servus servorum erit fartribus suis.

† Bochart. Geog. Sac. l. 4, c. 1.

whom learning emboldens, and zeal is apt to transport. But then the chronology, founded on the genealogies in the book of Genesis, supposes the tradition of these revelations, by which God communicated himself to man, to have been preserved so little a time after the deluge, that it gives a color to suppose all the nations of the world, nay even the descendants of Sem, ignorant of the one true God: and on this presumption, presumptuous dogmatical persons, who affect to be in the whole secret of the divine economy, establish the reason that they assign by another assumption, for the election and separation of the posterity of Abraham from all other people. Infinite wisdom, it seems, could contrive no other expedient for continuing the primitive faith and worship, for such that of the one true God was by these accounts, among the descendents of one family that had repeopled the earth, except this of reviving them, and continuing them by such a series of revelations and miracles among one people, as would have made any revival of them unnecessary among any other; because they would have been more than sufficient to continue them uncorrupted over the whole world, not only till the vocation of Abraham four hundred years after the deluge, not only till the coming of the Messiah two thousand years after that, but even to this hour, and to the consummation of all things.

Some place the era of idolatry precisely at Serug, who was three generations older than Abraham. Sir John Marsham thinks it a very proper date.* A probable one I am sure it is not, nor indeed a proper one for any purpose, except that of making mankind idolaters just in time for introducing the vocation of Abraham. This might render it proper for Eusebius, Epiphanius, and all the tribe of Jews and Christians who have employed every literary artifice to confine the knowledge and worship of God to the chosen seed, and to represent them as the sole object of providential care for twenty centuries. But I think that the learned and judicious chronicler has not deserved to be ranked among this partial and collusive tribe. We might call them the blind tribe too, since they must not have seen, unless you suppose that they saw, but depended on the blindness of a then ignorant world, that this knowledge and worship could not have been as confined as they suppose it from the time of the flood, unless God had by one continued miracle concealed himself to establish the kingdom of the devil, and altered the very nature of things to make so important, so universal, so indisputable a tradition die before its time, and, as we may say, at once.

* Can. Chron. Sac. 4.

When the same persons attempt to establish the credibility of the Mosaical history, they do not insist alone upon the divine inspiration of the author, but upon the ordinary means that he had of knowing, with the greatest certainty, all that we find related in the Pentateuch. These means were the traditions which they suppose to have come fresh and authentic to him through a very small number of generations, though from a very great antiquity. Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years; and the deluge happened sixteen centuries and a half after the creation. Noah therefore, who was born six hundred years before the deluge, had lived with those who had lived with the first of of men. Noah continued alive three hundred and fifty years after the deluge, that is, within seventy-six years of the vocation of Abraham, and Sem the son of Noah died just as many years after this vocation. From Abraham the traditions passed to Isaac, and from him to Jacob, and all the persons who had conversed with this patriarch could not be dead in the course of a century which intervenes between the decease of Jacob, and the birth of Moses. Thus you see that the traditions from Adam, to this legislator and historian, passed through about seven generations, and from Noah to Abraham, and his cotemporaries, through one or two at most, according to this chronology.

Let us take now this chronolgy for good, whatever objections may be made to it, or how precarious soever the principles of it deserve to be esteemed. But then let us ask every man of sense and candor who receives it, whether he can persuade himself that in the days of Abraham, about four hundred years after the deluge, nay much sooner, in the days of Serug, the existence of that God who had destroyed and restrored the world, in so astonishing a manner just before, could be wholly lost in the memory of mankind? I say just before, with very good reason; because the distance of three or four centuries, when the lives of men were reckoned by centuries, may be called properly just before. The deluge was an event as modern to Abraham, and the men of that age, as the restoration of King Charles the Second is to us of this age. Could the belief and worship of God be lost by the descendants of Sem, an hundred years before the death of Sem? Could they be lost even during the life of Noah? Is it possible to figure to ourselves the children of these holy patriarchs professing polytheism, and practising idolatry, under the eyes of their fathers, and Abraham, for instance, educated in the religion of the Zabians, a new name given by our learned men to the Chaldeans, after Mahometan writers, whilst Sem was still alive? Once more: Is it credible in the lowest degree of credibility, that the Chaldeans, who were able to give Calisthenes, two thousand years after the flood, astronomical obser-

vations of as great a number of years at least, should know nothing of the flood, of the occasion, of the author of it, in a word of the true God, in less than four centuries after it had happened? These improbabilities are so very monstrous, that it is marvellous any men should be hardy enough to impose them, or silly enough to believe them. When Maimonides is gravely quoted to prove Tarah an idolater, I let my book fall with astonishment. As soon would I quote Navarette, a Spanish missionary, to prove that the first coin of which we have any knowledge, is that made by Tarah the father of Abraham, at the request of King Ninus, and for thirty pieces of which Judas sold his master.

I know that Joshua is introduced in the twenty-fourth chapter of the book ascribed to him, speaking in the name of God to the children of Israel, and telling them that Tarah, the father of Abraham and Nachor, had served strange gods. Now that here and there a man might begin to corrupt the worship of the true God, even in these early days is just credible. But that the true God should be unknown, and idolatry established, at that time, is what I affirm to be incredible. Let commentators puzzle over the text, or take the fact as they find it without any examination, it will become other men to believe, that something has happened to the Jewish records, like that which happened to those of another ancient people, the Phœnicians; and that if the scribes of the former have not corrupted their history, as Philo Byblius, who published a Greek translation of Sanchoniathon in the reign of Adrian, complains that the priests of the latter had corrupted theirs; we may suppose, at least, as some even of the Jewish doctors have done, that the genealogies of the Bible, far from being complete, are imperfect abstracts; or that they have been compiled, as Father Fouquet, at his return from China, where he had resided three and twenty years, assured me that the chronological table in the "Scientia Sinica" had been. This table is composed of cycles of threescore years each, and all these cycles appear to us unbroken. But the learned Jesuit averred, that in the originals many of them wanted the beginning, and many of them the end. So that the space of time to which this table refers could not be shorter, but might be immeasurably longer than the chronological table, his brethren had put together, represents it. In a word, it will become reasonable men to assume any hypothesis, rather than to believe, against universal experience, the least disputable analogy, and the plainest dictates of common sense, that the knowledge and worship of God were entirely forgotten, whilst the preachers of both, and the eye-witnesses of the deluge, were still alive.

Let us believe, on the authority of Moses, that God trusting neither to the impressions of himself that are visible on the whole

face of nature, nor to the reason he gave to man, communicated this knowledge, and directed this worship by immediate revelations. But let us not be so absurd as to believe, on any authority, that so many signal revelations, and astonishing miracles, attested by evidence unquestionable, and delivered down by immediate, not remote tradition, could be forgotten so soon, nor that they could be remembered, and the great truths they communicated and confirmed, be forgotten. All these must have continued strongly impressed on the minds of men much longer, even in the ordinary course of things. They must have continued to be so, not only in the countries where the repeopling of the world began, but wherever the founders of nations led their colonies from thence, which they began to do in the days of Phaleg, that is about a century after the flood. If we believe on the authority of Moses, that God made himself known by revelations and miracles to all the men that were at a certain time in the world, and from whom all the nations of the world descended, we cannot believe, on the same authority, because we cannot believe consistently with it, that his being and his worship were unknown to any of these, or forgotten by any of them in the course of a very few years. The same authority would be made thus to contradict itself. In the case of another history, we should say that neither might be true. But in the case of this we may say that both cannot. The first is a plain, independent fact, that must be reputed true on the whole, whatever disputes may arise about circumstances, or the history must be reputed fabulous. But the other depends on a chronology very liable to mistakes, and not affecting the truth of the former. That famous astronomer, Cassini, took the pains to calculate backwards a remarkable eclipse, or two, that are mentioned in the ancient Chinese annals. He found that such eclipses had been, but the dates were not exact. Just so we find that the one true God was eclipsed, if I may use this expression; but though the eclipse lasted long, and lasts to this hour in some parts of the world, it could not begin so early, nor spread so universally as some men would induce us to believe. Will it be said that the confusion of languages, which began at once in the plains of Sennaar, and was followed by the dispersion of mankind into all the parts of the earth, as the story is generally though erroneously understood, interrupted or corrupted tradition, and gave occasion to the immediate establishment of polytheism and idolatry? But the argument to be drawn from this famous event will prove the very contrary. Though languages were confounded, memory was not destroyed, and the knowledge which had been common to all men whilst they lived together, and formed but one community, was continued and

delivered down in different languages after this division. The knowledge was dispersed, as those who had it were dispersed; and the same truths were taught then as they are now, in different tongues. Nay farther, this very confusion and the dispersion of mankind which were brought about in so miraculous a manner, and by an immediate act of the same omnipotent Being who had so lately destroyed, and now restored the world, would have become, if this had been the case, the strongest confirmations imaginable of the truths that were known before; and with the renewal and confirmation of these truths in their minds, the sons of men would have settled themselves in several countries, and have given beginnings to the several nations. Among these, therefore, and in opposition to truths so well known, and so signally confirmed, it was not possible that the Zabians, and the Magians, and every other sect of idolaters should arise, till by a long tract of time, and a multitude of revolutions in the affairs of mankind, true primitive traditions, and genuine theism began to decay together. Then, and not till then, might priestcraft prevail, which Mr. Locke esteems an obstacle to the progress of true religion, and which I believe, on principles founded in the Mosaical history, to have been the great corrupter of it after it had been established. I might easily illustrate and confirm these opinions, which are both true relatively to different times, and different places, by examples drawn from history, and even from the experience of our own age, from what passes in countries where the propagation of Christianity is attempted by missions, and in those where this religion is already established.

Something stronger than this may be objected to me. It may be said, that whilst I argue on probable reasons, and endeavor to show that the true God, and the true worship of him, could not be forgotten, nor polytheism and idolatry be established as soon as they are said to have been, among the nations of the world, I do not enough consider what passed among God's chosen people, in instances where no supposition of anachronism will help me to evade the force of Scripture authority. Some pert divine may bid me descend a little lower in the history of the Bible, and learn there how short the duration was, even among this people, of those impressions which revelations and miracles should have rendered permanent, and almost indelible, according to me, even among the other people of the world who were left to walk in their own ways. I do so again, as I have done already often, and I find that the posterity of Abraham, or the children of Israel, as they were called, after that some mysterious person or other had changed the name of Jacob who worsted him at wrestling, into that of Israel; I say, I find that they were become ido-

laters before their deliverance out of Egypt, confirmed, hardened idolaters, and so accustomed to the manners, and wedded to the superstitions of the Egyptians, that, however, Moses drew them forth as a separate people, there seemed to be, as Eusebius* himself confesses it happened he knew not how, no perceivable difference between them and the Egyptians. This may well appear the more surprising, if it be true, according to the common reckoning, that Jacob died less than two centuries before the exode, that Joseph died about fifty years after his father, and that Levi had not been dead so long when Aaron was born, and Moses after him. How this could happen, neither Eusebius was able to account, nor is any man else. Dr. Spencer† takes pains to prove the fact, and it is something odd to see the authority of Eusebius and Theodoret, of Maimonides, and R. Juda superfluously employed to confirm what the Bible had proved in several places to his hand. But when he goes about to reconcile the fact to some notion of reasonable probability, he succeeds still worse, and does as much too little, as he had done more than enough. The learned writer thinks, that if this people had been treated in a better manner by the Egyptians, they could, however, have hardly avoided taking up the barbarous manners of that nation to which they had been so long accustomed. But he argues, *à fortiori*, that this was inevitable, because they endured a cruel servitude in Egypt, and because such a servitude renders men little attentive to religious matters, and disposes them to conform to the manners and genius of their masters.‡ Now the very reverse of this maxim and this reasoning, seems to me to be true. The fear of stripes may produce, whilst it continues, such a conformity in outward show, but it can dispose men inwardly to embrace the manners and opinions, religious, or others, of their tyrants, no more than it can dispose them to love their persons, and even the appearance of such a conformity will cease whenever the slavish estate ceases. It will not only cease, but the slaves, become freemen, will throw off every badge of their slavery, and prefer the manners and opinions of those especially by whom they are delivered, to such as they professed through fear, when they were under the lash of their taskmasters, "pugnis fubstibusque sævientes."§ Tyranny may make hypocrites, it can never make proselytes. Whoever has studied human nature, and been careful to observe the course of human affairs, must think it repugnant to both, not only that the Israelites should forget the traditions of their fa-

* Præp. Evan. l. 7, c. 8. † De Leg. Heb. rit. l. 1, c.

‡ Tam servilis autem, et infælix vivendi conditio, hominum animos angustos reddere solet, rerum cœlestium curâ vacuos, et in dominorum suorum mores et ingenia pronos.—Ibid. § Ibid.

thers, and the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, in so short a time, but that they should have been as much wedded to idolatry as the Egyptians themselves were.

But if this be strange, it is stranger still to observe how little effect revelations of public notoriety, occasional, and constant or standing miracles before the exode, at the exode, in the wilderness, in the promised land, under their judges, and under their kings, had on the same people. They forgot the true God, even whilst he conducted them visibly through the desert. They revolted from him whilst the peals of thunder, that proclaimed his descent, on the mountain, rattled in their ears, and whilst he dictated his laws to them. All the power that omnipotence could exert was not sufficient to revive in the minds of this stubborn generation, the faith and piety of their fathers, nor a due and lasting sense of that religion which they certainly followed, for some time at least, after their settlement in Egypt: and Dr. Spencer therefore might have termed their manners barbarous with much more reason than he applied that epithet to those of the Egyptians.* As the means of conviction, and the motives of submission to the religion that Moses instituted, continued, and increased, so did the indocility, and apparent incredulity of this elect people. Neither the promises nor the threatenings, the rewards nor the punishments, by which God endeavored to attach them to himself, neither his condescension in wearing their crown, and in governing them like an earthly monarch till they deposed him, nor his constant residence even after his deposition among them, could succeed. They were proof against miracles to such a degrec, that there would not have been more room for surprise, if we had been told, that Noah and his family served strange gods even in the ark, than there is to find, in the history of this people, that they revolted back to idolatry nine hundred years together on every occasion. This history, in short, contains many particular miracles which operated effectually against the ordinary course of nature, physical and moral, and at the same time the whole thread of it is a system of miracles ineffectually operated, for a purpose so natural, that every one of them seems to make the next unnecessary.

If the divine now should ask me, after all that I have owned in favor of his argument, whether that which happened at, and after the exode, might not happen after the deluge? whether the families that peopled the earth at this period, might not forget

* Israelitas, sub prima incolatûs aegyptiaci tempora, scientiæ divinæ lampada à patribus acceptam habuisse, et religionem avitam integram et illibatam diu tenuisse, nobis facilè persuadeamus.—Ibid.

the true God and his worship immediately after it, notwithstanding any traditions, as we see that God's chosen and favorite people did during their bondage in Egypt and as they continued to do very frequently from that time till the Babylonian captivity, notwithstanding the miraculous advertisements, and the interpositions of Providence ever watchful to prevent these apostacies? If the divine, I say, should ask me such questions, my answer would be this. The history of the Bible tells me, that these things passed as I have represented them. But I know that they are repugnant to universal experience, and I have a conscious certainty that they are so to the human nature. Look into the history of the world, reverend sir, and you will find too many examples of pretended revelations, of forged miracles, and of groundless traditions, that have prevailed among mankind from age to age, to leave it in your power to think that unexceptionable revelations, real miracles, and certain traditions, could be ever ineffectual. Nothing less than the greatest of all miracles could make them so, and who should work such a miracle? Not God most certainly; for those which were disappointed of their effect, you say, were wrought by him. Was it then the Devil? How came he to have such a power, and to be suffered to exert it in such a case? I know farther most intuitively, that no creature of the same nature as I am of, and I presume the Israelites were human creatures, could resist the evidence of such revelations, such miracles, and such traditions as are recorded in the Bible. Look into yourself, reverend sir, and you will find it to be so. God appearing in all the terrors of his majesty, and his prophets denouncing judgments which were instantly, and literally fulfilled, to mention these particulars alone out of many must have roused the most stupid, have terrified the most audacious, and have convinced the most incredulous.

Such an answer as this might procure me in return some ecclesiastical billingsgate. I might be called infidel, deist, and perhaps atheist. I should be accused certainly of disbelieving the holy Scriptures. My reply to so angry a disputant would be calm, and such as might teach charity to those who preach it so much, and practise it so little. "Ne sævi magne sacerdos." I do not so much deny the truth of the facts related, as I oppose the application, and the use made of them. You argue from the conduct of the Israelites to that of other nations, and would persuade us, that all these might be polytheists and idolaters from the beginning; because the true God, and his worship, were forgotten so soon and so often by his chosen people. But I deny that any such analogy will hold good. The Israelites were a people set apart from the rest of mankind, and indeed so set apart, and so distinguished, that the proceedings of God towards

them, and their behavior towards God, and towards men, make all together such a series of history as can be compared with no other; such a history as shows us this people, but leads us to judge by analogy of no other. In profane history we acquire experience of mankind, and of human affairs. The benefit we reap from it consists in this, and by this general knowledge we judge of every particular history we read. In sacred history we acquire none of this experience. It is the history of a people not only set apart from the great community of mankind, but in many respects taken out, as it were, of the human system. To make the events recorded in it serve as foundations, therefore, of the judgments we pass on those that may have happened among other people, is just as absurd as it would be to make a collection of miracles, that is, of events out of the ordinary course of nature, and even repugnant to it, serve as the foundation of natural and experimental philosophy.

Let us believe then what is in the Bible, because it is there. Not like Tertullian, because it is impossible, or absurd; but although it be improbable, or inconsistent. At the same time let us not apply the extraordinary events that we find there, to such as happen in the ordinary course of human affairs. Much less let us apply our own observation and experience, by which we judge very properly of other histories, to that of the Bible. That of the Bible must stand on the bottom of its own authority, independently of all other; and I am persuaded that nothing has shaken this authority more than the silly attempts of some writers to confirm it by arguments drawn from the reason of things, that is, from a comparison of ideas derived from human observation and experience. It seems to me, that divines should rest the authority both of the Old and New Testament on the proofs they are able to bring of their divine original, and of the uncorrupt manner in which they have been conveyed down to latter ages, solely.

To establish the credit of other histories, for I consider the Bible here only as an history, it is not indeed sufficient to ascertain the authors of them; because these authors, being men, may have been deceived, or may have designed to deceive. For this reason their internal, as well as external proofs of authenticity are examined, and they are received, or rejected, as they appear consistent or inconsistent, conformable or repugnant to the observation and experience of mankind. But this second examination is unnecessary, when the question is about the word of God, known to be such by evidence superior to all contradiction, or it is impertinent and profane. If we could suppose the authenticity and divine original of the Scriptures destitute of sufficient external proof, this deficiency would not

be supplied by all the skill of those who pretend to discover, by their superior penetration, the internal proofs. If the autheticity and divine original of them be, on the contrary, sufficiently established by external proof, it is both impertinent and profane to pretend to confirm divine testimony, by showing that there is reason to believe it true. Reason has been too much employed where it has nothing to do, and too much neglected where it has most to do. Men have believed implicitly, when they should have reasoned, in laying the grounds of faith; and they have reasoned dogmatically, when they should have believed implicitly, these grounds being once laid.

A maxim has been established in theology, which may be brought to justify this proceeding against me, and the authority of St. Austin may be brought to justify the maxim. But the authority of common sense, much better than that of St. Austin, will justify me in saying that the maxim is false. The maxim is this, that miracles themselves are not to be admitted as proofs of a divine original, unless the cause, for which they are wrought, appears to us to be good, and therefore not till the doctrines they attest have been examined. By a parity of reason it may be said, that although the external evidence which proves the Scriptures of divine original, be full in that respect, yet the internal evidence must be sought for in them to make their authenticity complete in every respect. This maxim, and this way of reasoning were taken up perhaps very properly at a time when reports of miracles were easily believed, when every supposed magician was thought to perform them, and when they, who would not allow the pretensions of Appollonius Thyaneus, for instance, who was opposed by the pagans to Christ, and who was worshipped as a god with Christ, Abraham and Orpheus by the emperor Severus, were obliged however to acknowledge his miracles. But the case is widely altered, and it is as improper to insist on this maxim now, as it might be proper then. We know now that miracles, real miracles, can be operated by no power but that of God, nor for any purpose, by consequence, but such as infinite wisdom and truth direct and sanctify. We know therefore that no fact, nor doctrine, repugnant to the divine nature and attributes, can have been vouched by miracles, nor be taught in the word of God: and the difference is great between rejecting any such facts, or doctrines, and the authority on which they are founded, as in the case of the Alcoran, for instance, and refusing to admit all the facts and doctrines contained in a book proved by undeniable testimony of the fact to be the word of God: till, besides this external proof, divines have furnished the internal proofs they boast of, which are often the wildest hypotheses of imagi-

nation, and such as a doctor of Mecca would hardly frame in behalf of the Alcoran. Vain triflers! They pretend to develop the whole secret of a divine economy relative to man; and though it be so easy to discern what is evidently inconsistent with the divine attributes, that every reasonable man is able to discern it, yet these men are not stopped by such evidence. The presumptuous habits of theology carry them to talk of the plan, which they suppose infinite wisdom to have formed, as if they viewed it from an higher stage of intelligence and knowledge. From these whimsical paradoxes, they derive the greatest part of what they call the internal evidence of the Scriptures. On the whole, it is, I hope, plain by this time, that far from disbelieving the history of the Bible, I assert the authority of it, and endeavor to place it out of the reach of cavil, whilst the divine does the contrary; for by taking the same liberty as he takes, and which every other man has the same right to take, some will pretend to find internal evidences of a human, where he pretends to find those of a divine original: and thus the authenticity of the Scriptures, instead of being once for all fixed, will be rendered by theological ostentation a matter of eternal dispute. But still I deny, that the example of the Israelites at, and after the exode, under their judges, and under their kings, furnishes any argument against me. All the facts contained in the Mosaical history are true; be it so, at least for argument sake: but consistently with them I may believe, nay consistently with them I cannot believe otherwise, in opposition to Mr. Locke, and to all those who went before him in asserting what he asserts, that mankind could not be polytheists and idolaters from the beginning, no, nor near the beginning, and consequently that the belief and worship of the one true God could not be the national religion of the Israelites alone.

Let us consider now what will result from another hypothesis. We suppose then that men acquired, without any revelations general or particular, and by a due use of their reason, a knowledge of the one true God. That they might acquire it by these means, in former ages, cannot be denied with any sort of modesty, or candor since we are able to demonstrate invincibly this great truth by the same means: and if they might acquire it, on what pretence can it be said that they did not? Modern philosophy has opened a more glorious prospect of the works of God than that which the ancient nations appear to us to have had, and every new discovery adds to the magnificence of the scene, and to the force of the argument. But the great author of nature was always visible in every part, even the most minute, of the system of nature; and they who were far from seeing as much of it as we see, though we too are far, very far surely, from

seeing the whole, might easily observe an unity of design, which pointed out most evidently the unity of that Being by whose wisdom the design was laid, and by whose power it was executed. All I assume therefore is, that among creatures to whom God has given sense and intellect, there have been many at all times who not only saw like the rest what was visible, but who discovered by reflection and contemplation what was intelligible, and yielded to the testimony God has given of himself. On this assumption we shall find reason to believe that genuine theism could be at no time confined to any one people, and that it must have been at different times, and in different places discovered, established, corrupted, lost, and renewed, according to the vicissitude of human affairs.

We represent the first communities of men roving about in herds, like some other animals, and such as we see many of the savage people of the world at this hour. As long as they continued in that state, the unity of God might be unknown to them, because, reason operating much more slowly, and especially in such a state, than the affections and passions of our nature, a multitude of superstitious notions, arising from ignorance and fear, could not fail to take possession of the minds of these men, and to prevent, or misguide their reason. All the objects that surrounded them were new to them, and as they had not the experience of others to direct their judgment concerning the impressions which these objects made upon them, so their own experience came too late. The prejudices of superstition had rendered them inattentive to it, or unfit to make a reasonable use of it, before it came. But this could not continue, even on this hypothesis, to be long the universal state of mankind.

Nations were civilised, wise constitutions of government were framed, arts and sciences were invented and improved, long before the remotest time to which any history, or tradition extends; and all this could not have been done without much more information of the moral and physical system of the world, and much greater efforts of human reason than were necessary to demonstrate the first principle of true theism. Let us conclude, therefore, on grounds of the highest probability, that God was known to such as made a due use of their reason, and demonstrated by them to others, even in nations unknown to us; and since he was known, that he was worshipped; for to say he was known and not worshipped, is little less absurd than it would be to say he was worshipped and not known.

But though God was known and worshipped, it will not follow that this knowledge and worship were preserved, or even established any where in all the purity of theism. Were they so among the Israelites, who retained so many of the rites, and

ceremonies, and superstitious opinions of the Lower Egypt? though they believed the unity of God, and abhorred idols, like the people of the Upper? In short, are they so at this time? Are they so among us? It has been observed in the foregoing essay, and I have just touched the same thing in this, that the seeds of superstitious opinions and practices having been sown before nations were formed, or governments established, it is not unreasonable to believe that the first legislators cultivated them for political purposes. Nay even such as were neither polytheists, nor idolaters themselves, for it is very reasonable to suppose there were some such, might nurse up an abundant crop of superstition by the very means by which they designed to promote true religion. This we shall not think improbable if we consult history, or if we consider it analogically to the experience of our own age. To work effects contrary to the intention of them, is a fate that attends very frequently the best of human expedients, and the reflection does no honor to our wisdom and foresight. Private ambition grew up naturally among those who intended nothing more by promoting religion, than the political purposes of government, and the enthusiasm of superstition arose still more naturally among those who promoted it, because they believed in it. Both these motives contributed to corrupt genuine theism, to disguise first, and to conceal afterwards, the simplicity of natural religion under the tinsel, and the embroidery of polytheism and idolatry. From both of them proceeded so many false pretences of revelation and inspiration, the legerdemain of miracles, and such blasphemous affectations of a divine nature, or mission, as the Indian Foe, or the Arabian Mahomet imposed on a great part of mankind.

That men are capable of falling from the knowledge of the one true God into polytheism, and from a pure worship of him into idolatry and superstition, by such means as I have mentioned, and by others, whether this knowledge and this worship were communicated to them by revelation, or discovered by the use of reason as other truths are, this very reason as well as experience will evince. But the difference between the hypothesis which assumes, that the unity of the Supreme Being was taught by revelation alone, confirmed by miracles, and delivered down by tradition; and the hypothesis we go upon here, which assumes that this truth might be discovered by reason as well as by revelation at all times, and therefore must have been discovered at some times by those who had no other guide but reason, deserves to be considered a little more.

The proposition which affirms that all the nations of the world, except the Israelites, were ignorant of the true God from the beginning, is, in many respects, to the last degree absurd. It

implies that the Israelites were a nation from the beginning. But were they so, if we reckon from Adam, or even from Noah, or even from the vocation of their father Abraham? If they were not so, why are they excepted as such from the beginning out of the assumed general ignorance of mankind concerning the true God? Some divines will tell us, that though God might be discovered, yet he could not be fully and certainly discovered, nor such as he is, by reason alone. That he was pleased, therefore, to discover himself by immediate revelation, not to the bulk of mankind, but to patriarchs, to prophets, and to his chosen people, both when they were a family and when they were a nation. That he has revealed himself ever since in the same manner, and to the same persons, that is, to his elect, in the Scriptures; which help them, says Calvin in the sixth chapter of the first book of his Institution, like spectacles, to read distinctly and clearly what others discern confusedly and imperfectly. But they who compare the ideas and notions concerning the Supreme Being that reason collects from the phenomena of nature, physical and moral, which we know to be the works of God, with those that the books of the Old Testament, which we suppose to be his word, give us, will be apt to lay these spectacles aside, and to conclude that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob cannot be that glorious Supreme all-perfect Being whom reason showed them, and whom they discerned with their naked eyes. But again: What do those words, all the nations of the world, signify? If we understand them literally, they affirm what it is impossible the affirmers should know to be true. If we understand by them, as we are apt to do, a few nations only, such as were formed on the first repeopling of the world by Noah, and his immediate descendants, they affirm what is still more improbable. In a word, this proposition stands in direct contradiction to the other, which is part of the same hypothesis: for if the knowledge of the true God was communicated by revelation, and propagated by the first men who were witnesses of this revelation, according to the Mosaical account, the true God must have been universally known in the beginning, and from the beginning. This needs no proof, it is self-evident; and they who will maintain that the nations of the world were ignorant of the true God from the beginning, with any consistency, must give up Moses; and instead of assuming such a revelation, and a tradition in consequence of it, they must admit that all men were ignorant of the true God, till some of them discovered this great truth by philosophical observation and meditation, and communicated it to others, as it is said that Abraham did.

They may suppose, as much as they please, that the tradition was worn out, and the knowledge lost entirely, in less time than

would have been sufficient to destroy the memory of the most trifling events, and the least important opinions; even this will not save their hypothesis. On the supposition of such a revelation, and of such a tradition, it would be still absurd to assert, that all the nations of the world were ignorant of the true God from the beginning; as it would be hard, on the supposition that this knowledge was ever entirely lost among men, to account for the belief of one Supreme Being, which prevailed in the esoterical, or secret doctrines of philosophers, whilst their exoterical, or public doctrines, were favorable to polytheism. All this, a general ignorance, and particular knowledge, can be accounted for no other way than by admitting, not only that the knowledge of one Supreme Being is to be acquired by reason, without the necessity of any revelation, or of any miracles to impose it, and that it has been so acquired in the improved, though not in the original state of mankind; but also that it may be, and has been established in general and national belief, at certain times, and under the influence of favorable conjunctures among several ancient nations. The authority of revelation, if God revealed himself to men in any other manner than by his works, being conveyed down by tradition, and this tradition being spent in a long tract of time, and by the various accidents which happen according to the course of human affairs, nothing would remain to keep up, or to renew, this belief in the minds of men. But the authority of reason ceasing to be exerted, or ceasing to prevail, reason would still remain, and be at hand to renew this belief, and propagate it again in a more happy season. Revelation descends like a torrent, and bears down all before it, whilst the tradition of it is fresh and strong. But this force diminishes gradually; the stream grows feeble, and ceases at last to run, by a necessity arising from the nature of things. The stream whereof reason is the source, may be obstructed in its course. It may creep scarce perceived in the same channels, or it may disappear entirely; but when it rolls no longer on the surface, it runs under ground, and is ever ready to break out anew.

Our physical and moral systems are carried round in one perpetual revolution, from generation to corruption, and from corruption to generation; from ignorance to knowledge, and from knowledge to ignorance; from barbarity to civility, and from civility to barbarity. Arts and sciences grow up, flourish, decay, die, and return again under the same, or other forms, after periods which appear long to us, however short they may be, compared with the immense duration of the systems of created being.—These periods are so disproportionate to all human means of preserving the memory of things, that when the same things return, we take frequently, for a new discovery, the revival of an art or

science long before known. It is much the same with opinions, and even with many demonstrated principles of knowledge.—The most absurd of the former come into public vogue, as well as the most evident of the latter; and the latter go out of it again, as well as the former. Let us descend into some particulars that may serve to illustrate what is here said.

When we look into the history of the Greeks and Romans, how ignorant do these people appear to have been in the art of navigation? In what cockboats was the fate of the war decided at Salamis? What idea must we have even of the Carthaginian fleets, when we see them vanquished by a people whose skill had gone, till the first Punic war, little farther than hollowing trees into misshapen and unwieldy canoes?* How slow was the progress of this art afterwards? Confined to the Mediterranean, and attempting little and seldom the Ocean, obliged in both to cling to the shore,† the stoutest of their ships of war would have foundered where a Deal yawl rides securely. Shall we conclude now from these representations, that they show us the beginning of navigation? No. We see in them the decay of the art.—To inquire critically into the voyages of Bacchus, of Hercules, of Jason, to fix the time when these heroes flourished, or when Minos held the dominion of the sea, would be impertinent industry. It is enough to know, that though the Greeks were frightened at the flux and reflux of the sea, that new and astonishing phenomenon to this knowing people, even at the time of Alexander's expedition, the Indian Ocean, rough as it is, had been explored long before by merchants who sailed from the coast of Arabia and Egypt. If Hercules erected his columns at at the mouth of the Straits, the Phœnicians passed beyond them. They visited the coasts of Portugal, the Fortunate Islands, or the Canaries, and even the utmost Thule; perhaps the other hemisphere, and the islands, at least, which Columbus had the honor of discovering some thousands of years afterwards. The ships of Midacritus, or Melcartus, traversed the Bay of Biscay, and brought lead or tin "ex cassiteride insulâ," probably from Cornwall. This we learn from obscure tradition, and what do we see in the clearer light of history but the restoration of this very art? We have spoken of an art. Let us speak now of a science.

Astronomy had made a low figure among the Greeks for some time before Hipparchus, who lived about the time of the sixth or seventh of the Ptolemys; and though we hear much of the fame of Thales, of Pythagoras, and Eudoxus, yet astronomy and astrology, which we distinguish very properly, were in those

* Candicariæ naves. † Legere et radere littus.

days confounded together. Men were much more attentive to discover the imaginary influences of the stars, than to observe their real motions: and the honors done to Berosus by the Athenians, for his divine predictions, show us in what manner, and to what purposes this science was cultivated a little before Hipparchus, that is, in the time of Alexander. Hipparchus invented mathematical instruments for observing the celestial phenomena, and observed, it is said, very accurately. Ptolemy, another astronomer, came after him, and though he made some pretensions to astrology, as others had done, yet he was an astronomer in the proper sense. He improved on the improvements of Hipparchus, and the system which bears his name was universally received. It continued to be so till Copernicus arose. But if we conclude from hence, that we see the whole rise and progress of astronomy, or that Copernicus was the author of a new system, we shall be much deceived. We see astronomy in its decayed and corrupt state, and we see it recover from thence, and return back to its true principles. The beginnings of it, among the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, if in truth it did begin among them, the progress they made, and the degree of perfection to which they carried it, are unknown to us. But besides several probable reasons, which determine us to think that they carried it very far, we know certainly that the true solar system, which Copernicus discovered about two hundred years ago, was taught in the Pythagorean schools above two thousand years ago, and was by consequence that of the schools of Egypt and Babylonia.

To speak now of opinions, and of the self-evident, or demonstrated principles of real knowledge: the former fluctuate perpetually. When one of them alone can be true, a thousand that stand in direct opposition to one another are entertained. Whilst they last they are unsteady. Time and experience explode them often; and when they return into use again, they are seldom exactly the same. The latter are fixed and uniform. Time and experience confirm them, they cannot be exploded, they may be unknown, or they may be forgotten; but whenever they are perceived by the mind, far from degenerating into opinions, they are perceived by every mind alike. Thus, I think, we are to understand that axiom of the Stoician Balbus, "opinionum commenta delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat." It may be, it has been said, that the latter part of this axiom is often contradicted by experience, and that false demonstrations have taken often the place of true, as opinions merely probable, nay improbable, have passed among whole nations for the most demonstrated truths. But I suspect that this has been the case in appearance rather than in reality, or that the exceptions are too few to inva-

lidate the general rule. Truths that may be called properly the judgments of nature, because they are conformable to the nature of things, and have been deduced from thence by a process of reasoning in every step of which the mind has had intuitive knowledge, cannot be removed, they must be confirmed by time, the nature of things, and the reason of men continuing the same. But these very truths may be so disguised by opinions which are thought to be compatible with them, which muffle them up, and which cling to them, though they be parts of them no more than clothes are parts of body, that the same principle of real knowledge professed by different people, or at different times, appears to be a different principle. If Diagoras, or Theodorus, or Vanini, or any other particular atheist, for a community of atheists never existed out of Mr. Bayle's head, had been asked, whether it is not the interest of every individual to submit to government, and to promote the good of society; or if any theist had been asked, whether this be not the duty, as well as interest of every individual, they would all have answered in the affirmative, and have assented to these first principles of public and private morality. Notwithstanding this, what a variety of opinions has there not been about this interest and this duty? They have been so various, as well as the practice of men consequent from them, that whoever considers his own, or past ages, may be tempted to think, that in some countries the obligation of submitting to government is esteemed unconditional, and illimited; and in others, no obligation at all; or that, as he sees no country wherein the common duties of society are enough observed, so there are others wherein every man deems himself an individual, independent by nature, and disavows any such duty. Suppose now that in one of these countries liberty be established on a system of law, equally distant from tyranny, and from licentiousness. Suppose that in another such a reformation of manners be wrought, no matter by what means, that the duties of morality are practised in it universally, and with the utmost exactness, shall we conclude from these examples, that in the former case the principles of public, and in the latter those of private morality, were never known, or had been lost, and were then demonstrated anew? Shall we not rather conclude, according to the truth of things, that these principles have been always known, and that the new establishment, and the new reformation, do nothing more than strip them of the false opinions which were so complicated with them, that men derived their institutions and notions, not from the sure judgments of nature, but from the false comments of opinion?*

* N. B. There is a passage in Polybius worth being turned to on this oc-

Thus again, the existence of one Supreme, self-existent and all-perfect Being, the first intelligent cause of all things, was acknowledged, as we discern more or less clearly by almost all our ancient traditions, in those nations who had any pretence to be esteemed civilised, and most directly and explicitly in those that were the most enlightened by knowledge. But yet this bright and luminous truth, this judgment of nature, was clouded by such a multitude of superstitious notions, that it appeared dubiously, and that something which seemed repugnant to it might have been objected to every nation who professed it in their outward, or even in their secret doctrine. An orthodox Israelite was scandalised, no doubt, when he beheld among his heathen neighbors their deceased kings and heroes erected into divinities, and adored as such. But we may assure ourselves, that an inhabitant of Thebes in Egypt, who acknowledged no god but the unborn eternal Kneph, or even a polytheist, who worshiping many gods, that is, inferior divinities, acknowledged still one Supreme Being, the monarch of gods and men, was not less scandalised when he saw this Being, of whom he had the sublimest conceptions that the mind of man can frame, degraded into the rank of a local tutelary divinity, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of one family, and one nation, of a family who had strolled into Egypt for bread, of a nation who had been long slaves in that country. In vain would the learned priests of all sides have explained their symbolical rites, and mystic doctrines. The Israelite would have remained convinced, that the one true God was unknown to the heathen; and the heathen, that he was unknown to the Israelite. It fared with this principle of knowledge, as Plutarch observes in one of his miscellaneous tracts, in the manner that it fares with the virtues. The prudence of Ulysses appeared different from that of Nestor, and the justice of Cato from that of Agesilaus. The same principle of knowledge, derived from the same use of reason, took various appearances from the various opinions that were complicated with it in the minds of men, much as the same virtue took a different hue, according to the different tempers, characters, and circumstances of those who professed and practised it.

This seems to have been the state of things till the coming of Christ. Whether the knowledge and the worship of the one true God were taught by revelation, or by reason, that which is affirmed concerning them cannot be true. In the first case, they must have been known from the beginning by all the people of

casion. It is in the thirteenth book. He observes there how truth is disguised or concealed by the false opinions of men; but he insists, that these last for a time only, and that truth prevails always.

the earth, and long before the Israelites grew up to be a nation. In the second case, the man who should assert, that Abraham, or any other of the patriarchs, was alone able to make these discoveries by dint of reason, and philosophical reflection, would not deserve a serious answer. Nay further, if we go upon the first supposition, that of revelation, if we take the words of some divines, that this belief and worship could be communicated no other way to mankind, and that this sacred deposite was trusted to a people chosen to preserve it till the coming of the Messiah, this assumption will appear as little conformable to the reason of things, as several others are which the same men advance to be parts of the divine economy, and for which they appeal to the reason of mankind. Reason will pronounce, that no people was less fit than the Israelites to be chosen for this great trust on every account. They broke the trust continually, and the miracles that were wrought to preserve it, notwithstanding their apostacies, would have preserved it at least as well all over the the world. Besides, the revelations made to them were "shut up in a little corner of the world, amongst a people, by that very law which they received with it, excluded from a commerce and communication with the rest of mankind," as Mr Locke* observes very truly; a people so little known, and contemned, and thought vilely of by those nations that did know them, were therefore very "unfit, and unable to propagate the doctrine of one God in the world."

But wherefore, then, was this deposite made to them? It was of no use to other nations before the coming of Christ, nor served to prepare them for the reception of his gospel; and after his coming, it was in this great respect of little use, if of any, to the Jews themselves. They believed universally one God, but they were not universally disposed to believe in his son. Monotheism might indispose them to the gospel, as well as their attachment to the law of Moses. The expectation of the Messiah did not clash with monotheism. But they might imagine, that the belief of God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost did so very manifestly; the trinity not having been early reconciled to the unity of God. Other nations seemed to be better prepared by philosophy, by that of Plato in particular, and by the polytheistical notions of divine natures, some in the godhead, and some out of it, for the reception of the gospel, or of the theology which the preachers of the gospel taught. Accordingly we find, that when Christ came, and threw down the wall of partition, if he did throw it down, and not St. Paul, the miracles wrought to propa-

* Reas. of Chris.

gate Christianity had greater effect out of Judea than in it. On the whole matter, it is impossible to conceive, on grounds of human reason, to what purpose a divine ecconomy, relative to the coming of Christ, should have confined the knowledge of the true God to the Jews, and have left the rest of mankind without God in the world. On the other side, if men discovered the Creator of all things by their observations and their reasonings, things must have passed much as the memorials of ancient times give us grounds to believe that they did pass. The knowledge of the true God must have been uncertainly propagated, and uncertainly maintained; it must have been never lost, but always liable to be darkened by too much ignorance and stupidity in some, and too much imaginary knowledge, and the endless refinements of opinion in others.

That our Savior found the whole world in a state of error concerning this first principle of natural religion, though not of absolute darkness, is allowed; and that the spreading of Christianity has contributed to destroy polytheism and idolatry is true. But that which Mr. Locke advances to have been the consequence of this great event is not true. It is not true, that God has been made known to the world by this revelation, with such evidence and energy, that polytheism and idolatry have been no where able to withstand it. On the contrary, orthodox theism has not prevailed in some countries where it has been taught. In others, Christianity has been established on the ruins of polytheism and idolatry, and has been rooted up again in its turn. Revelation has not better success than reason. Neither has been able to preserve the purity of the doctrines they taught, nor a uniformity in the practice they prescribed. Nay Mahometism, a religion instituted by an Arabian free booter, who imposed himself for a prophet of God, and composed that extravagant rhapsody of superstition and enthusiasm the Koran, has been further propagated than Christianity and that not by the sword alone, no more than Christianity. Mahomet and the first caliphs established their religion by the success and terror of their arms. But since that time it has been extended by spiritual conquests, and not only the conquered, but the conquerors, for such the Turks were, have embraced it. Christ, his apostles, and the first preachers of Christianity, established this religion by their miracles, and by their sufferings. But since that time it has been propagated and preserved by violence as great at least, as that which the Saracens employed to establish the other. But however and by what means soever, these religions have been extended, that of Mahomet has taught the unity of God in terms so clear, and so precise, as to leave no

room for any opinions that may be so much as strained into polytheism; and has so effectually banished all kinds of images, that the most gross and superstitious of the vulgar cannot have the least occasion of sliding into idolatry.

Christ found the world in darkness and error. But if he was to come again, would he not find it in the same state? Would he find even the religion he came to establish, either practised, or even taught in its genuine purity? Would he not find the decalogue shortened, and the creed lengthened, by some Christians? Would he not find the creed shortened by others, who left the decalogue of the same size, even by Mr. Locke himself? Christianity has been from the institution of it in a perpetual flux, not relatively to certain opinions alone, that may be deemed indifferent, or not quite essential; but relatively to fundamental articles, on which the whole system leans. Let me produce one instance, which will illustrate, and confirm, what has been said against those who take so much pains to make us believe, that polytheism and idolatry prevailed among the nations of the world from the beginning. Arianism had very nearly prevailed in the Christian church. It was all that intrigue could do to check, and all that wars and persecutions, wherein millions perished, could do to extirpate this heresy. Let us suppose now that these salutary methods had proved ineffectual, and that the orthodox faith was at this time creeping about in corners, as the Arian faith actually is, and was preserved only by a few rational and thinking men, who were fain, in their outward profession and worship, to go with the herd, and to keep to the religion established by law: I ask, would it be fair to conclude, that the orthodox faith had never been the faith of the Christian church, and that this abominable heresy had been established from the beginning? It would not be so most certainly. To recapitulate therefore, and to conclude: I think it plain, that the knowledge and worship of the one true God must have been the religion of mankind for a long time, if the Mosaical history be authentic, and was not therefore confined from the beginning to the family of Sem, nor to the Israelites who pretended to be of it. I think it plain, that the assumed confinement of this orthodox faith and worship could answer no imaginable design of a divine economy, preparatory to the coming of Christ; since the Jews, who had it, were not better prepared than the Gentiles, who are said not to have had it, to receive and embrace the gospel; and since this doctrine was propagated much more by heathen philosophers than by Jewish doctors. I think it plain, that if we suppose the unity of God to have been discovered by reason, and to have been propagated by human authority merely, the belief of it

must have gone through all the vicissitudes, and have been exposed to all the corruptions that appear to have attended it. I add, that we have the less reason to be surprised at this, or to doubt of it, since we see that very faith, which God himself came on earth to publish, which was confirmed by miracles, and recorded by divine inspiration, subject to the same vicissitudes, and the same corruptions.

ESSAY THE FOURTH:

CONCERNING

AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

SECTION I.

All men are apt to have a high conceit of their own understandings, and to be tenacious of the opinions they profess; and yet almost all men are guided by the understandings of others, not by their own, and may be said more truly to adopt, than to beget, their opinions. Nurses, parents, pedagogues, and after them all, and above them all, that universal pedagogue custom, fill the mind with notions which it had no share in framing, which it receives as passively, as it receives the impressions of outward objects, and which, left to itself, it would never have framed perhaps, or would have examined afterwards. Thus prejudices are established by education, and habits by custom. We are taught to think what others think, not how to think for ourselves; and whilst the memory is loaded, the understanding remains unexercised, or exercised in such trammels as constrain its motions and direct its pace, till that which was artificial becomes in some sort natural, and the mind can go no other.

Wrong notions, and false principles, begot in this manner by authority, may be called properly enough the bastards of the mind; and yet they are nursed and preserved by it as if they were the legitimate issue; nay they are even deemed to be so by the mind itself. The mind grows fond of them accordingly, and this mistaken application of self-love makes men zealous to defend and propagate them by the same kind of authority, and by every other sort of imposition. Thus they are perpetuated, and as they contract the rust of antiquity they grow to be more respected. The fact that was delivered at first on very suspicious testimony, becomes indisputable; and the opinion that was scarce

problematical becomes a demonstrated proposition. Nor is this at all wonderful. We look at original, through intermediate authority, and it appears greater and better than it is really, just as objects of sight are sometimes magnified by a hazy medium.—Men who would have been deemed ignorant, or mad, or knavish, if they had been our cotemporaries, are reverenced as prodigies of learning, of wisdom, and of virtue, because they lived many centuries ago. When their writings come down to posterity, posterity might judge indeed of their characters on better grounds than report and tradition: but the same authority which showed them in a half light, screens them in a full one. Paraphrases and commentaries accompany their writings. Their mistakes are excused, their contradictions are seemingly reconciled, their absurdities are varnished over, their puerilities are represented as marks of a most amiable simplicity, their enthusiastical rants as the language of the most sublime genius, or even of inspiration; and as this is frequently done with much skilful plausibility, so it is always aided by the strong prepossessions that have been created in their favor. The first traditional authorities that handed down fantastic science, and erroneous opinions, might be no better than the original authorities that imposed them. But they were sufficient for the time; and when error had once taken root deeply in the minds of men, though knowledge increased, and reason was better cultivated, yet they served principally to defend and embellish it. Truths, that have been discovered in the most enlightened ages and countries, have been by such means as these so blended with the errors of the darkest, that the whole mass of learning, which we boast of at this hour, must be separated, and sifted at great expense, like the ore of a poor mine; and like that too, will hardly pay the costs.

It may sound oddly, but it is true in many cases, to say, that if men had learned less, their way to knowledge would be shorter and easier. It is indeed shorter and easier to proceed from ignorance to knowledge, than from error. They who are in the last, must unlearn before they can learn to any good purpose; and the first part of this double task is not in many respects the least difficult, for which reason it is seldom undertaken. The vulgar, under which denomination we must rank, on this occasion, almost all the sons of Adam, content themselves to be guided by vulgar opinions. They know little, and believe much. They examine and judge for themselves in the common affairs of life sometimes, and not always even in these. But the greatest and the noblest objects of the human mind are very transiently, at best, the objects of theirs. On all these, they resign themselves to the authority that prevails among the men with whom they live. Some of them want the means, all

of them want the will, to do more; and as absurd as this may appear in speculation, it is best, perhaps, on the whole, the human nature and the nature of government considered, that it should be as it is.

Scholars and philosophers will demand to be excepted out of the vulgar, in this sense. But they have not a just claim to be so excepted. They profess to seek the truth without any other regard; and yet the task of unlearning error is too hard for them. They set out in this search with the same prejudices, and the same habits that they who neglect it have, and they lean on authority in more cases than the others. If they improve and employ their reason more, it is only to degrade her the more; for they employ her always in subordination to another guide, and never trust themselves wholly to her conduct, even when authority cannot have the appearance of authority without her approbation. The task of unlearning error, and laying authority aside in the search of truth, is not only hard in itself, but it becomes harder still by two considerations, as it implies a self-denial of vanity, and of ambition. Scholars are ostentatious of their learning, and though he who has read much will not arrive at truth so soon, nor so surely, as he who has thought much, yet will he make a greater glare, and draw more admiration to himself. The man who accumulates authorities of philosophers, of fathers, and of councils to establish an opinion that must be founded in reason, and be agreeable to the common sense of mankind, or be founded in nothing, is not unlike the child who chooses a crown in several pieces of brass, rather than a guinea in one piece of gold. Thus, again, we must not imagine that we behold an example of modesty and moderation, when we see a whole sect of philosophers submit to the authority of one, as pagans, Christians, and Mahometans did in their turns, and for many ages, to that of Aristotle; whilst they dared to reason in no other form, nor on any other principles than those which he had prescribed. It is in truth an example of rank ambition. Such men, like the slaves who domineer in absolute monarchies, intend by their submission to a supreme tyrant to acquire the means of exercising tyranny in their turns.

There are innumerable cases in common life, and many in arts and sciences, wherein we must content ourselves, according to the condition of nature, with probability, and rely on authority for want of the means, or opportunities, of knowledge. I rely on the authority of my cook, when I eat my soup; on the authority of my apothecary, when I take a dose of rhubarb; on that of Graham, when I buy my watch, and that of Sir Isaac Newton, when I believe in the doctrine of gravitation; because I am neither

cook, apothecary, watchmaker, nor mathematician. But I am a rational creature, and am therefore obliged to judge for myself in all those cases where reason alone is the judge; the judge of the thing itself; for even in the others, reason is the judge of the authority. My parson might reproach me very justly with the folly of going through the journey of life without opening the eyes of my mind, and employing my intellectual sight. But my parson grows impertinent when he would persuade me, like those of your church, to remain in voluntary blindness; or like those of ours, to let him see for me, though my eyes are open, though my faculties of vision are at least as good as his, and though I have all the objects of sight before my eyes that he has before his.

Resignation to authority will appear the more absurd, if we consider, that by it we run two risks instead of one. We may deceive ourselves no doubt. But is the divine, is the philosopher, infallible? We shall not mean to deceive ourselves most certainly. But the divine, or the philsopher may intend to deceive us. He may find his account in it, and deceit may be his trade. Had these men that superiority over others, which some of them have assumed; did the sublime objects of divine philosophy appear to them, though they do not appear so to us, in the effulgence of an immediate and direct light, there would be some better reason than there is for a dependence on their authority, at least in one respect. We might own their knowledge sufficient to establish this authority, whatever we thought of their candor and sincerity. But God has dealt more equally with his human creatures. There is no such superiority of some over others. They who exercise their reason, and improve their knowledge the most, are dazzled and blinded whenever they attemp to look beyond the reflected light wherein it is given us to contemplate the existence, the nature, the attributes, and the will of God relatively to man. They who pretend to face, like so many intellectual eagles, the sun of eternal wisdom, and to see in that abyss of splendor, are so truly metaphysical madmen, that he who attends to them, and relies on them, must be mad likewise.

The more important any subject is, the more reason we have to be on our guard against the impositions and seductions of authority, and to judge in the manner we can for ourselves. The all-wise God has disposed the universal order so, that every man is, by his nature, capable of acquiring certain and sufficient knowledge of those things which are the most important to him, whilst he is left to probability and belief about others: and yet such are the contradictions which reconcile themselves to one another in the heads and hearts of men, that even they who

perceive the importance of the subject, and are not delivered over by a supine neglect to authority, are however deterred by an unreasonable timidity from the use of their own judgments, and are determined by an affection of their minds, in opposition to common sense, to deliver themselves over to the prevalent authority whatever that be. Thus, they who invade the reason of mankind triumph not by their own strength, but by the prejudices of the invaded. Their success may be compared to that of a certain prince who placed, it is said, cats and other animals, adored by the Egyptians, in the front of his army when he invaded that people. A reverence for these phantoms made the Egyptians lay down their arms, and become an easy conquest.

This timidity is the less excusable, because the divine wisdom, as I hinted above, has been pleased to manifest to us a rule of inquiry and judgment in matters of divine philosophy and natural religion, that is sure, as far as it goes, and it goes most certainly as far as the same wisdom intended that our inquiries and judgments should proceed. It serves at once both to direct and limit them. God has shown these great objects to us in a light reflected from his works, and proportioned to our nature. He has shown them in no other, in the ordinary course of his providence. The way therefore to avoid fantastical, and to attain some degree of real knowledge concerning them, is to apply ourselves to a careful observation of the phenomena of nature, corporeal and intellectual, as nature is commonly distinguished. The true foundations of natural theology must be laid in natural philosophy. So they have been laid, in part at least, by ancient and modern theists, and by the latter especially, since the wonderful discoveries that have been made by the improvement of experimental philosophy; discoveries that might send the wisest men of antiquity, sacred and profane, could they arise from the dead with all their wisdom and all their learning about them, once more to school.

The foundations* of theism have been laid wider, but they

* This note is added a great number of years after I had written what is contained in the text referred to, and after my opinions concerning the Supreme Being, and the proofs of his existence, had been established in my mind; because I have lately found, in the history of the royal academy of sciences at Berlin for the year 1746, a dissertation written by a very ingenious man, a very good philosopher, and one with whom I have been long acquainted, that I cannot approve on many accounts. His avowed design is to deduce the proofs of God's existence from the general, not any particular laws of nature, and to deduce those of motion and rest metaphysically from the attributes of the Supreme intelligence.

To make way for this proof, he rejects or endeavors to weaken every other proof, on this pretence, that the attempt to establish truth on false reasonings

wanted no solidity before these discoveries. These new proofs, nay all proofs beyond those which every observing man is able to draw even from an unphilosophical view of the system of nature, are proofs "ex abundantia." I honor most sincerely those philosophers who have endeavored to raise the thoughts of men,

is the greatest injury which can be done to it. I shall not take on me to examine his hypothesis how little soever I like the deduction of a physical hypothesis from metaphysical principles, instead of establishing general, abstract, or if you please, metaphysical axioms on particular experiments and observation.

Mr. Maupertuis lays no weight on the famous argument of Des Cartes taken from the idea of an infinite, all-perfect Being, which he supposes to be in the human mind; and Maupertuis is in the right. He says little on the assumed universal consent of mankind to this great and fundamental truth, and he is not in the wrong. This consent is not such as it stands represented by many. It is general enough to show the proportion which this truth bears to the universal reason of mankind, and I think it would prove no more if it was still more general. The actual existence of such a Being cannot be fairly deduced from it. He will not insist, he says, on the argument which may be drawn from the intelligence whereof we are conscious, to a first intelligence, infinite, and eternal, which is the original of all intelligence, and the first cause of all things; and yet I apprehend that he has given us none so good by the help of metaphysics, and mathematics, as this, which is plain and obvious to the conception of every rational creature.

That some theists have reasoned weakly from the phenomena of nature to the existence of God is, I believe, true, as I am sure it is true that others would have made the doctrine of final causes ridiculous, if any thing could make it so, by the ridiculous application of it on every unworthy and trifling occasion. But we must not learn from hence to despise all those arguments which ancient philosophers drew from the beauty, order, and disposition of the universe, on this smart conceit, that they knew too little of nature to have a right to admire it.

He is not satisfied neither with those which Newton, and much less with those which other naturalists have drawn from the same phenomena. If he cites those of Newton, it is only to show how weak and inconclusive even these are. Newton thought that the uniform motion of the planets proved itself necessarily to have been directed by choice, not by chance, and he shows the great probability of this doctrine. But then he thinks there remains probability enough on the other side, to hinder us from saying that this uniformity must have been necessarily the effect of choice, though it should be granted agreeably to Newton's system, that all the celestial bodies being drawn towards the sun, move in a vacuum. On the other hand he advances, that the force of Newton's argument being founded alone on the impossibility of assigning a physical cause of this uniformity in his hypothesis, it will have no force with other philosophers. The uniformity of these motions will not appear inexplicable to those who admit a fluid matter, in which the planets are hurried round, or by which their motion is moderated. On this foot we are not reduced to the alternative of supposing either chance, or choice, and such an uniformity of motion will prove the existence of God no more than any other motion impressed on matter. This Maupertuis says. But till the physical cause of the uniform motion of the planets has been explained intelligibly by the hypothesis of a fluid, we must remain where we were, and have recourse in one case, as well as in the other, to choice, or chance.

by these discoveries, from the phenomena up to the author of nature, instead of amusing the world, like many others, with metaphysical abstractions. But yet I think, that we wanted neither a Boyle, nor a Ray nor a Derham, nor a Newyntit to convince us of the self-existence of an intelligent Being, the first cause of all things; and I am sure that we are much to blame if we want a Bentley, or a Clarke, to put us in mind, for in truth

This philosopher thinks that the argument, drawn by Newton from the formation of animals, has no more strength than the former. He asks, whether, if the uniformity of some be a proof on one side, the infinite variety of others will not be a proof on the other side? Now surely these proofs are so far from being contradictory, that they coincide. The eagle, the fly, the stag, the snail, the whale, and the oyster are very different animals no doubt; and the immense variety of the different species of animals appropriated to different elements and purposes, displays the magnificence of the animal world, and the infinite power of its author, as the uniformity of all those of the same species shows the design and wisdom of that Being who created them, and appropriated them to the same elements, and to the same purposes. When we compare an eagle to a fly, we find a proof of one. When we compare an an eagle to an eagle, we find a proof of the other. In short the objection is founded in cavil, not in argument.

Mr. Maupertuis proceeds, and admits, but admits as if it were for argument's sake alone, that the proportion of the different parts and organs of animals to their wants, carries a more solid appearance; and he judges that they reason very ill, who assert that the uses to which these parts and organs are applied, were not the final causes of them, but that they are so applied, because the animal is so made. Chance gave eyes and ears, and since we have them, we make use of them to see and hear. He thinks however it may be said, that, chance having produced an immense number of individuals, those of them whose parts and organs were proportioned to their wants, have subsisted, whilst those who wanted this proportion, have perished and disappeared. Those who had no mouth, for instance, could not eat, and live; those who wanted the organs of generation could not perpetuate their species: and thus from the present state of things theists draw an argument, which will appear fallacious, when it is applied to the possible original of things.

To ridicule the proofs of this kind, he asks, a little too triumphantly, what it signifies to discover appearances of order and proportion, if after this discovery we are stopped in our reasoning by some untoward conclusion? He instances in the serpent, who can neither walk nor fly, and yet saves himself from the pursuit of other animals by the flexibility of his body, which enables him to crawl away faster than many of them can follow him. The cold of the winter would chill him to death, if the form of his body, and the slippery smoothness of his skin, did not enable him likewise to creep through holes that hide him under the ground. This is the discovery. The untoward conclusion follows, and he asks, to what purpose does all this serve? Why truly to none but the preservation of an animal, whose bite is sufficient to kill a man. Thus the philosopher endeavors to destroy one proof of God's existence by begging the same question as the divine begs, when he would prove that God is unjust, because there is either physical or moral evil in the world; that is, by assuming man to be the final cause of the creation.

The great and respectable persons, such as Father Malebranche, whose authority Maupertuis cites against the order observed in the construction of the universe, and who were at loss to comprehend how it could be the work

they do no more, of the existence of such a Being. In short natural theology rests on better foundation than authority of any kind, and the duties of natural religion, and the sins against it, are held out to us by the constitution of our nature, and by daily experience, in characters so visible, that he who runs may read them.

These revelations, for such they may be properly called, are made to the reason of mankind; and the same reason that collects them from the face of nature, is able to propagate the knowledge of them, and to find means of enforcing, as far as the general imperfection of our nature, and particular contingent circum-

of a Being infinitely wise and powerful, built their objections on the same assumption, and ran as he observes, into many absurd systems. But I waive entering any farther here into the consideration of this assumption, and the use that is made of it, since I have taken occasion to speak fully about it in another place.

The criticism he makes on that expression which closes the first of Mr. Pope's ethic epistles, "whatever is, is right," cannot be maintained. The proposition is not advanced as an argument to prove the existence of God, nor as a profession of faith, "un act de foi." I presume Mr. Pope meant it as a reasonable consequence of what he supposed already proved, and that when design and wisdom were so evidently marked in all the works of God which are objects of human observation and knowledge, it became his creatures to conclude that the same wisdom and designs were employed in the whole, though human observation and knowledge cannot reach to the whole; and therefore that he was justified, as he was most certainly, in pronouncing that "whatever is, is right." To say that this axiom tends to submit all things to a fatal necessity, is not true. To say that it establishes submission and resignation to the Divine Providence, in opposition to the pride and presumption of philosophers and divines, is true. It is a truth which no man should be ashamed to own and which every rational creature should be ashamed to contradict.

Maupertuis himself admits enough to establish this truth, when he admits that intelligence and design are perceivable in a multitude of the phenomena; and yet he does not give up the point. It is not enough, he says, to prove intelligence and design. To prove the wisdom of God, we must penetrate into the objects to which this intelligence and design were directed. Ability in the execution is insufficient. To show his wisdom, we must prove his motives to have been reasonable. To what purpose do we admire that regularity with which all the planets move the same way, almost in the same plane; and in orbits nearly alike, if we do not see that it is better that they should move so than otherwise, that is, if we have not discovered the sufficient reason that Leibnitz requires in all cases where things may be done more ways than one? A reasonable man may content himself, without this sufficient reason, in many cases, and Leibnitz blundered greviously when he pretended to have found it in some. I doubt Maupertuis has not succeeded better in deducing the first and universal laws of nature from the attributes of an all-wise, and all-powerful Being, in order to show, that since these laws, which are observed in the universe, are the very same which such attributes must have produced, such a Being must exist, and be the author of these laws. Happily we have no want of this demonstration.

stances admit, a conduct suitable to them. But men have not been contented to do this. They have imagined, or they have found in the frailty of the human nature, and the imperfection of the human state, an apparent necessity of going farther; of adding art to nature, falsehood to truth, and their own inventions for divine communications. In order to make the imposition pass, they have set authority in the place of reason. The religion of nature, and therefore of the God of nature, is simple and plain: it tells us nothing which our reason is unable to comprehend, and much less any thing which is repugnant to it. Natural religion and reason are always agreed, they are always the same, and the whole economy of God's dispensations to man is of a piece. But religions, founded in the pretended revelations we speak of here, grow voluminous and mysterious, oppose belief to knowledge, and when they cannot stand a reasonable examination, escape from reason by assuming that they are above it. Many such religions have appeared in the world. We Christians reject them all not only because they carry most evident marks of imposture, but because there can be no more than one true revelation, and that is undoubtedly the revelation we acknowledge; for choosing of which, however, and for rejecting the others, we must confess that we had no reason at all, or we must confess that the truth of a revelation is an object of reason, and to be tried by it.

Religions, instituted by men who thought themselves inspired when they were only mad, or by men who were thought to be inspired when they were only cheats, rest on the mere authority of their founder, maintained and improved by his disciples, and their successors. Reason had no share in examining the original pretended revelation, nor has much in examining the descent of the tradition that preserves it. How could reason have any share in examining and controlling the first, on which the last, and all the consequences of an imposture depend, among men ignorant and credulous, or who were prepared by superstition to believe revelation no uncommon event? The enthusiast was not enough in his senses to reflect, that in order to be assured he had a revelation from God, it was necessary he should have not only a lively inward sentiment of the divine truth that he supposed revealed to him, but also a clear and distinct perception of the time and manner in which this supernatural operation was performed. The impostor was enough in his senses to know, that no one was able to prove he had not the revelations he pretended to have; because no man is able any more to perceive the perceptions of another man's mind, however occasioned, than to see an outward object by the eyes, or to hear a sound by the ears, of another. Believers in men of both these characters were

never wanting; and far from examining, it became a merit not to examine.

He said it, was foundation enough for an article of faith in the Pythagorean religion; and the same proof was sufficient to establish the religion of Foe that began in India, was propagated into China, and spread in several sects all over the East. The same observation may be made on other religions that have been imposed by the force of authority, no matter how acquired, on ignorant and superstitious people at first, and on those of more sense and knowledge, when the authority was grown too strong to be shaken. But Christianity was not so imposed; and nothing can be more plain than this, that God submitted the authority of his revelation at the time he gave it, and therefore at every later time much more, to the reason of the creatures to whom he gave it.

When we consider the great and glorious purposes of this revelation, the manner in which, and the person, even the Son of God himself, by whom it was made, and all the stupendous miracles in the heavens, and on earth, that were wrought to confirm it, we are ready to conclude that such a revelation must have left reason nothing to do, must have forced conviction, and have taken away even the possibility of doubt. This consequence seems so necessary, that if such events were stated hypothetically, the hypothesis would be rejected as defective and inconsistent, unless they were supposed to have had their full effect; and yet in fact, an universal submission of all those who were witnesses of the signs and wonders that accompanied the publication of the gospel, did not follow. The learned men among the Jews, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the rulers of the people, were persecutors of Christianity, not converts to it; and the vulgar, as well as they, were so far from believing Jesus to be the Messiah their nation expected, or any divine person sent by God, that when Pilate inclined to save him, instead of Barabbas a notorious criminal, the whole crowd cried out, "let his blood be on us and our children," and insisted, with a sort of mutinous zeal, on his execution.

What are we to say now? The Jew will insist that the miracles might be such as they are reported to have been, but that if they were such, they were wrought by the powers of magic, like those of Apollonius of Thyana; or by some secret charm like that of the true pronunciation of the name that consisted of four letters, the famous tetragrammaton; and that his ancestors had reason therefore to reject the proofs drawn from them, instead of believing, that the God of truth had set his seal, as it were, to an imposture. The infidel will insist, that all these miracles were equivocal at best, such as credulous superstitious persons, and

none else believed, such as were frequently and universally imposed by the first fathers of the Christian church, and are so still by their successors, wherever ignorance or superstition abound. He will apply to miracles, what Bessarion said of saints, and bid us judge of the ancient by the modern. Thus will these men account for the little success which the gospel had, on the first publication of it: little, I mean, when compared with the authority of the preacher, whose divinity was sufficiently manifested under the disguise of humanity.

SECTION II.

But I ask what will a good and reasonable Christian say? He will not allege, I think, that the Jews were rejected, and the Gentiles called in: since his two antagonists would be ready to answer, that he set the effect in the place of the cause, and the cause of the effect, when he assumed, that the Jews refused to believe in the miracles and gospel of Christ, because they were rejected, instead of assuming that they were rejected because of their unbelief. Would he follow the example that has been set on other occasions? Would he reason from his notions, well or ill abstracted, of order, and of the fitnesses and unfitnesses of things to the conduct of God, call this reasoning demonstration, and when he found the phenomena stand in opposition to it, as they would do evidently in the present case, since that universality of submission to the Son of God was not paid, which ought to have been paid, according to all our ideas of order and fitenss, would he have recourse to some bungling hypothesis to reconcile them? If he took this method, it would happen to him as it has happend to divines very often: he would strengthen the objection of the infidel, and not be able to solve it afterwards.

An end to which the means are not proportioned can never be the end of infinite wisdom, seconded by infinite power. The means employed to establish and maintain the gospel have not been sufficient to do it independently of reason, and by the mere force of authority, from the first publication of it. The end and design therefore of infinite wisdom was not to subject human reason, how much soever it was in fact subjected by the first converts, to a revelation received implicitly, even on the authority of the Son of God himself, and much less on any other. Reason was made so necessary to judge of this revelation, even at the time it was given, that if we suppose ourselves transported back to that time, and inquiring into the truth of this revelation on the very spot where it was made, we shall

find, that far from being determined by authority in favor of it, our reason would have had much to do in comparing the various and contradictory testimonies, and in balancing the degrees of probability that resulted from them. The contest between the first witnesses of Christian revelation, and the rest of the Jews who witnessed against it, became a party contest, carried on with great zeal on the persecuted side, and great cruelty on the other. They disputed not only about the miracles that had been wrought, and were daily working among them, even about that decisive concluding miracle the resurrection of Jesus, but about the interpretation of their prophecies, which foretold the coming of the Messiah, and about the application of them to him. In such a confused state of things, on whose authority could any honest inquirer have depended? If he had weighed, or if he had counted suffrages, he would have been equally determined against the truth; and upon the whole he must have despaired of coming to a determination at all by any other way than that of employing the utmost sagacity of his mind, and judging for himself, unless it had pleased God to make him some particular revelation.

This advantage St. Paul boasted that he had. The miracles of Christ and of his disciples made so little impression on him, though he had not only heard of them all, but had been an eyewitness, at least, of that which appeared when St. Stephen was stoned to death, that he signalised his zeal against Christianity, till he himself became the subject of a most miraculous operation, and was called upon by Jesus in a short, but very pathetic expostulation.* In this manner he was converted; and in this manner every inhabitant of the earth, Jew or Gentile, learned or ignorant, might have been converted, as well as he. But it was not in the plan of Providence to employ the immediate, particular, miraculous, and therefore irresistible authority of revelation in many cases: and all other authority, even that of miracles, occasionally wrought before some, and reported by others, being inadequate to universal conviction, the generality of men were left to embrace Christianity or not, as their reason, right or wrong, weak or strong, should direct, and reason not being subdued by revelation was subjected to reason. St. Paul was not in this case: his reason had been subdued effectually. But he dealt with other men as being in it. He argued, he expostulated, he appealed to their reason principally. He worked, indeed, now and then a miracle, as it was given him to work them; for his case in this respect may be compared to that, which a divine of the faculty of Paris, whom I have quoted elsewhere, assumed

* Acts of the Apost. ch. ix.

to be the case of all those who wrote the books of the Old Testament. One seemed to have had inspirations, and the others a power of working miracles occasionally, not constantly. Paul, therefore, appealed chiefly to the reason of mankind in his several missions. On two of these missions, at least, it may be to our present purpose to make some reflection.

He preached at Antioch to the Jews and to the Gentiles: the former contradicted him, disputed with him, and raised a persecution against him and his companion Barnabas. The apostles worked no miracles on this occasion, like men who knew how ineffectual the authority they procured was, for the most part, in the then ordinary exercise of that power. The last recourse was to reason: and when that failed, the apostles turned themselves from the lost sheep of the house of Israel to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were more docile, and free from the prejudices of the Jews about their prophecies, which only served to mislead them: reason had more effect on these; they rejoiced, they glorified the word of God, and they believed, that is, as many of them as were preordained to eternal life;* for it would seem, by this passage, that neither authority, nor reason, nor miracles, nor all these together were sufficient to make men proselytes to Christianity without a previous designation, and divine election.†— Let us follow St. Paul from Antioch to Rome, where he succeeded a little better among the Jews. Those of Asia looked upon him as an Apostate, and were the more averse to Christianity, perhaps, for his preaching it. But the Jews at Rome had no prejudice against him, though he was brought thither in chains. They had received no letters about him from Judea; no one that came from thence had spoken any evil of him. They had heard, indeed, of a new sect which was every where opposed, and they were desirous to know his opinion of it.‡ They took a day to hear him, and they heard him with remarkable patience, for they heard him from morning to night. He was full of the Holy Ghost, he argued from the law of Moses, from the prophets, and from every other topic, as we may assure ourselves, and omitted nothing that might persuade them to embrace the gospel. What was the effect? Some believed, and some

* Credidêrunt quotquot erant præordinati ad vitam æternam. Acts. c. xiii.

† N. B. The opinion that God acts with men by arbitrary will, and by virtue of his absolute sovereignty over his creatures being once established; and in consequence of it, the doctrines of election, reprobation, and an eternal predestination; much of what has been said falls to the ground. Miracles were as superfluous as reason, where special grace was to operate, and both insignificant, where it was not to operate. I own myself unable to reconcile these apparent inconsistencies, and I leave that task to others.

‡ Acts, Ch. xxviii.

believed not. The same may be observed of his proceeding at Thessalonica. He went into the synagogue, he worked no miracles, but he reasoned with the Jews three Sabbath days, &c.

To conclude on this head then, it is plain that the first publishers of Christianity did not rest the cause primarily, or solely, on authority of any kind. It is plain that they submitted the gospel, and the authority of those who published it, to the examination of reason, as any other system even of divine philosophy ought to be submitted. The consequence was, that it prevailed, as other religions have done, and not with that universal assent which might have been expected from a religion given by God himself, and given to all the sons of men; from a revelation, their belief in which was to decide their eternal happiness or misery, and which omnipotence could have imposed as easily on all as on some, if infinite wisdom had so designed. Right reason is always on the side of truth: it is truth, and can never differ from itself. But right and wrong reason, the bona and mala ratio of Cotta, being nothing else than the result of a right and wrong use of our faculties, it is no wonder, the imperfection of these faculties, and the prejudices and seductions to which we are exposed being considered, that the wrong takes often the place of the right, and passes for it. Why the natural order of things was preserved thus far in the case of a supernatural dispensation, why so many particular miracles were wrought ineffectually to the general avowed design of this revelation, and why the divine authority of it was not manifested to all concerned in it, that is, to all mankind, as the divine authority of the law was manifested to all concerned in it, that is, to all the Israelites, let us not presume to guess. In this manner Christianity was first promulgated; and in this manner, therefore, it was right and fit that Christianity should be promulgated.

But now, since the prerogative of reason was thus established over revelation originally, it is proper we should inquire how far this prerogative extends now, and whether it be lessened, or increased, by length of time. In order to this divines teach, that we must distinguish between the external and internal evidences of the truth, and divinity, of the Christian revelation; by which I mean the testimony brought to prove the fact, that this revelation was made by God, and the character of the doctrines contained in it, whether worthy or unworthy of a divine original. If they can establish the fact sufficiently, the second attempt seems little necessary; but it is for the honor of Christianity to stand such examinations, as every pretended revelation declines; and our divines themselves exhort us so to examine; though it must be confessed, that when the result of our examination is not strictly conformable to the doctrines they teach, they damn

us for examining, according to that absurd prerogative which they exercise frequently of advancing general propositions, and of condemning them in particular instances. Let us not be so absurd. He who examines in a manner to show, that whilst he refuses submission to the authority of man, as if it was that of God, he is careful not to reject the authority of God, as if it were that of man, does much more service to Christianity than he who resolves all into authority, and builds his religion on his faith, instead of building his faith on his religion; that is, than he who assents to facts and doctrines, and a whole system of religion implicitly, without an examination of any part of it, instead of believing things that he can neither comprehend, nor examine, on the foundation of those which he comprehends, and has examined.

Of the two sorts of evidence that have been mentioned, the external comes first under examination; for nothing can be more ridiculous than that which has happened very often to philosophers and learned men, to examine the causes of things, to descant profoundly on their nature, and after that to find that the existence of these things was doubtful, or the non-existence certain. One of your divines would urge the authority of the church on this occasion, as sufficient to supply the want of any other proof, and to fill up the measure of probability, which he would call certainty. But he would urge it most absurdly, since he would prove in a circle the authority of a church by that of the Scriptures, and the authority of the Scriptures by that of the church. One of our protestant divines who unite in opposition to the authority of your church, and would be glad to erect an authority very like to it each in his own, would mince the matter a little, would rather insinuate than assert such an authority, and rather persuade than demand submission to it. He would allow, that in the full latitude of evangelical liberty, you have a right to examine the testimony in favor of Christianity. But he would attempt at the same time to show you, that it is much more easy, and full as safe to rely on the authority of so many pious, judicious, and learned men as have made it the business of their lives to examine the testimonies of this revelation, and have agreed to affirm the validity of them.

Neither of these divines however would be so ridiculous, I think, as to deny that the external evidence of Christian revelation has been diminished by time. They would own, that it has been so by the loss of many proofs, whereof time and accidents have deprived us. But I am apt to suspect, that if time and accidents had been more impartial, and had conveyed down to us all the proofs that were brought for it and against it, though proofs would have been more abundant, the evidence would not have been greater, and we should be puzzled as much by con-

tradictory, as we are by scanty, proofs. We have indeed the concurrent testimony of the sacred writers, and it has been asked, whether we have not as much knowledge of them as we have of several profane writers whose histories pass for authentic? It has been said too by some of those, who corrupt oftener than they correct the text of ancient authors, that it is by a multitude of various readings, and of critical emendations, that these authors have been restored. But the comparisons are by no means just; for a different proof is necessary of the competency of authors, and a different assurance of the sense of their writings, according to the different use that is made of the authority. We know that the memorials of men who had been captains in the army of Alexander, and eye-witnesses of all that passed in his famous expedition, were in some instances different and contradictory. We have reason to suspect the veracity of Cæsar in some parts of his commentaries; and if we had the commentaries, of Labienus, or those of Asinius Pollio, as we have the history of Dion Cassius, we should have still more reason to suspect, or we should find more proofs, perhaps, of the errors. We read, however, the histories of Arrian, and even of Quintus Curtius, though we do not know who the latter was; and the commentaries of Cæsar, as authentic histories. Such they are too, for all our purposes; and if passages which we deem genuine should be spurious, if others should be corrupted, or interpolated, and if the authors should have purposely, or through deception, disguised the truth, or advanced untruth, no great hurt would be done. But is this the case of the Scriptures? In them, besides all the other circumstances necessary to constitute historical probability, it is not enough that the tenor of facts and doctrines be true; the least error is of consequence. There was a time when the eastern and western churches had great disputes about the procession of the Holy Ghost; whether he proceeded from the Father and the Son, or from the Father by the Son. These disputes occasioned much disorder, though the difference of a monosylable was alone concerned. But other disputes had arisen before these, lasted longer, and devasted almost all Christendom by wars, persecutions, and massacres, though the sole difference between the contending parties was about a single letter. One side affirmed, and the Nicæan council decreed, that the Son was ὁμοούσιος, that is, consubstantial with the Father, "habens simul essentiam, id est, eandem essentiam;" the Arians, most of them at least, would have acknowledged him to be ὁμοιούσιος, that is, of similar substance, "habens similem essentiam;" but the Holy Council adhered, and the Arians were all damned for the difference of an iota. If the decrees of councils, therefore, and the several creeds that were made required so exact a precision of

words and letters, and if the least mistake was of such fatal consequence, what must we think, what have we not reason to fear concerning that text on which they have all pretended to be founded, and wherein it is said, that there are thirty thousand various readings? When we meet with any record cited in history, we accept the historical proof, and content ourselves with it, of how many copies soever it may be the copy. But this proof would not be admitted in judicature, as Mr. Locke* observes, nor any thing less than an attested copy of the record. The application is obvious, and if it be reasonable to take such a precaution in matters that concern private property, and wherein the sum of ten pounds may not be at stake, how much more reasonable is it to neglect no precaution that can be taken, to assure ourselves that we receive nothing for the word of God, which is not sufficiently attested to be so. It may be said, it has been said by a very able writer, that "the ground of this proceeding in civil courts seems to be, that the original record, or an attested copy, is capable of being produced; and that therefore to offer any distant proof might look as if some art were intended to corrupt matters, and to disguise the truth." After this, he asks, "is it in the nature of things as possible and easy to produce the originals, or attested copies of the Scriptures ——— as it is to do so in matters which come before a civil court?" The evasion is not even plausible. The copy of a copy is not refused in proof, solely because the original or attested copy may be had; for this is not always the case, but because the proof would be too distant whether they can be had or no. The two cases therefore are not vastly, as this writer affirms, nor at all different. If the rule may be thought reasonable in the one, it cannot be thought without absurdity, unreasonable in the other. However it happens, the want of an original, or of an attested copy, is a want of proof: and the learned divine will be forced, if he is pushed on this article, to confess this want of proof, or to supply it, which he is too wise to attempt, by showing that the Scriptures we have are attested copies of the originals. I might carry this very far, if I would carry it as far as occasion is given to carry it. But I will only say, that it would be much better to leave objections unanswered, than to answer them no better; and that I pity a man of as good parts as Dr. Conybear, who is obliged to such drudgery. The authenticity of the Scriptures has suffered much diminution by length of time, and by other ways; for which reason divines would do better, perhaps, if they trusted more to grace and faith to supply this diminution, and less to their own skill, in the establishment of the external proofs of a traditioual

* Essay, l. 4, c. 16.

revelation; though I know that these external proofs may be deemed to be in some sort "conditiones sine quibus non."

SECTION III.

But the prerogative of reason extends farther than the examination of witnesses, and other external testimony. There is another ground of probability to be established; and if this cannot be established, the credit of a revelation will not support itself on the other alone. This ground of probability is that which was mentioned at the same time with the former, and is called internal evidence. Divines sound it high, and build much upon it; but their proceeding is, to my apprehension, alike absurd and licentious.

A divine, who has a large stock of theological presumption, finds direct and evident proofs of a divine inspiration in the very style of the Scriptures; in the sublimity of some parts, and in the simplicity of others: though the same sublimity, and the same simplicity are to be found in uncanonical writings, and even in those of eastern nations that are not Christian. He reasons magisterially, as if he was thoroughly acquainted not only with the human, but with the divine nature; as if his understanding bore so near a proportion to the wisdom of God, that he could discover it latent in the deepest mysteries, or under the veil of things seemingly so indifferent, or so common, that men of less sagacity would not suspect even human wisdom to have been employed about them; and finally, as if his extended genius was able to comprehend a whole economy of divine wisdom from Adam down to Christ, nay even to the consummation of things; to connect all the dispensations, and to show the sufficient reason of Providence in every particular instance on the same plan. This now is madness, or something worse than madness; and yet men are so accustomed to reason in this method, and on these principles, that not only the learned and ingenious, who have some pretence to be so mad, pursue them, but every dabbler in theology, who has no such pretence, and must pass for a fool or a knave whenever he grows extravagant, affects to reason in the same manner when he writes, or when he preaches; and talks as impertinently in the pulpit of the designs of God, and of the conduct of Providence, as he talks of the political designs and conduct of his governors in the coffee-house. Thus the Bible becomes a canvass, on which it has been the business of many to daub, from the time when it was first spread before them. If it was agreed, that some outlines may have been traced by the original painter: yet would it be

manifest, that several particular figures, and the composition of the whole system is the work of bungling human pencils.

From a motley system thus framed, the pretended internal evidences of divine revelation are drawn, and they are often drawn in such a manner, that he who might yield to external proofs is shocked at these, instead of being confirmed by them. How should it be otherwise, when these proofs are not brought even as they are found in this motley system, and when they take the appearance, for they have often no more, of proofs, not from the plain text and tenor of the Scriptures, but from the amplifications and conjectures of divines? These amplifications and conjectures take away the force of the proof, such as it is, by showing too visibly that they are amplifications and conjectures; for it is not lawful to proceed in cases where divine, as in those where human knowledge, wisdom, and authority are alone concerned. In these, our endeavors to improve what we find are not only lawful, but laudable; and it is no more reasonable that the authority of those men, who have gone before us, should fix the bounds of our inquiries, than it is that our authority should fix those of the men, who are to come after us. Human science would have been long ago at a stand, if a contrary practice had prevailed universally, as we see it is, and has long been, in those particular countries where the contrary practice has so prevailed. But what is commendable in one case, is blameable in the other. We have no more right to add to the word of God, than we have to alter it: and the same revelation which gives us divine knowledge, in what proportion soever it be given, and how little soever it may satisfy our curiosity, and our imaginary want, confines it likewise. The human master may tell us all he knows, and we may carry knowledge much farther on his instructions, and on our own strength. But the divine Master tells us no more than he judges it fit we should know, and every step we attempt to make beyond his express revelation, and on our own strength, is a step we make in the dark, exposed to err, and sure not to know.

Though I think that the internal evidences of a divine revelation neither are, nor can be, such positive proofs as they are pretended to be; yet am I fully persuaded that reason ought to examine the inward character of a revelation, as well as the outward testimony. Negative proof will supply the want of positive proof: and thus a sure and real criterion will be found, instead of one that is equivocal at best, and imaginary. I will not perplex the argument by considering how far a conformity to the general experience of mankind is to be exacted in a history that relates principally to supernatural events; but I may insist that there is

another conformity, a conformity to all we know of the Supreme Being, and of the law of our nature, so very essential to a revelation that pretends to come from God, that if any one thing repugnant to this knowledge be found in any history, or system of doctrine, they ought to be rejected, whatever proofs external or internal they may boast of a divine original. Though we hold no very exalted rank among the intellectual creatures of God, yet has he been pleased to give us faculties by which we are able, in using them well, to demonstrate all that he has judged necessary for us to know in our national state, and without supernatural assistance, concerning his existence, his nature and attributes, his providence over his creatures, and their duties to him and to one another. We ought to acknowledge, with the utmost gratitude, the advantage of such a rank in the order of beings: and shall we dare to assume for true any facts, or any doctrines that are evidently inconsistent with this knowledge, however even good men may endeavor to reconcile in opinion, by frivolous discourse, things that are irreconcileable in nature, or whatever authority be employed to impose them? God forbid that we should. Right reason will never advise us to do so, and if any pretended revelation required that we should, it would prove itself to be false, for that very reason.

Natural revelation, so I will call it, produces knowledge, a series of sensitive and intuitive knowledge from the first principles to the last conclusions. The system of things that are, that is, the phenomena of nature, are the first principles; and reason, that is, a real divine illumination, leads us from one necessary truth to another through the whole course of these demonstrations. In all these cases we know; we do not believe. But in the case of supernatural revelation, when it is traditional, we can have nothing more than opinion, supported by human authority, and by decreasing probability afterwards. The divine authority, grows less and less apparent, whilst the obligation of submission to it is reputed still the same. But the certainty of natural revelation suffers no diminution. It is always original, and equally capable of forcing our assent in all times and places, because the principles by which it is manifested are equally objects of human sense and intellect, in all times and places. The missionary of supernatural religion appeals to the testimony of men he never knew, and of whom the infidel he labors to convert never heard, for the truth of those extraordinary events which prove the revelation he preaches: and it is said that this objection was made at first to Austin the monk by Ethelred the Saxon king. But the missionary of natural religion can appeal at all times, and every where, to present and immediate evidence, to the testimony of

sense and intellect, for the truth of those miracles which he brings in proof: the constitution of the mundane system being in a very proper sense an aggregate of miracles.

Upon the whole, let us suppose the historical and traditional authority, urged in proof of a revelation, to be carried as high as the nature of things will admit, on a concurrence of all the conditions necessary to establish such a probability as ought to stand in lieu of certainty, in every other case, and as may induce us, in this case, to believe even in instances that are not at all conformable to general experience; yet must we not receive it for true till we are sure, on the most careful examination, and analysis, that it contains nothing unworthy of the majesty of the Supreme Being, nothing inconsistent with the demonstrated truths of natural religion. Profane history may contain such things as are not conformable to general experience, and be nevertheless credible in all other respects. But sacred history, the history of a divine revelation, that contains any one thing unworthy of the Supreme Being, or repugnant to the religion of nature, and to the most evident dictates of reason, ought to be rejected with indignation, and will be so by every man who is afraid to blaspheme. There are many occasions on which we cannot discover the whole truth, and on which, however, we are very able to discern what implies contradiction with some self-evident, or demonstrated truth. This may be one of those, and on this we shall be sure not to err, if we persuade ourselves that the same God who gave us reason to arrive at certainty in some cases, and at probability in various degrees in others, never designed that we should oppose probability, in any case, to certainty, nor believe against knowledge. Dr. Barrow, in a discourse concerning the virtue and reasonableness of faith, after begging the question long, and talking in a theological cant more worthy of Paul than of a man like him, as he was bound by his profession to do, talks like a philosopher, and a man of superior sense. He says, that "if we seriously weigh the case, we shall find that to require faith without reason is to demand an impossibility; and that God therefore neither doth, nor can enjoin us faith without reason." Now I ask, if we are not obliged to believe without reason, can we be obliged to believe against it? He says, "that no man can believe he knoweth not what nor why;" and therefore that he who "truly believeth must apprehend the proposition, and must discern its connection with some principle of truth, which, as more notorious to him, he before doth admit." Now let me ask, again, can any man be said to apprehend a proposition which contains a mystery, that is, something unintelligible; or any thing more than the sound of the words? Will not the argument against believing become still stronger, if a proposition is repugnant to any

principles of truth, which we have before admitted on evident demonstration? I am proud to have doctor Barrow on my side and will therefore conclude, as he does, that the man, who pretends to believe otherwise, "doth only pretend to believe out of some design, or from affection to some party; his faith is not so much really faith as hypocrisy, craft, fondness, or faction."

This being premised, let us own that when a revelation has passed successfully through those trials, when it has all the authenticity of human testimony, when it appears consistent in all its parts, and when it contains nothing inconsistent with any real knowledge which we have of the Supreme all-perfect Being, and of natural religion, such a revelation is to be received with the most profound reverence, the most entire submission, and the most unfeigned thanksgiving. Reason has exercised her whole prerogative then, and delivers us over to faith. To believe before all these trials, or to doubt after them, is alike unreasonable; for nothing can be more absurd and contemptible, than what St. Austin somewhere or other, for in his works I have read it, advances about believing first, in hopes of understanding afterwards; which is a proposition much like that which Calvin,* as absurd and as dogmatical a father as Austin, maintains, when he makes the authority of the Scriptures to depend on the inward testimony of the spirit alone, and then mentions the proofs proper to establish the authenticity and divinity of these books, as props, "adminicula," that may help to support the faith they could not have raised.

SECTION IV.

If such absurdities as these have induced some to ridicule all religions that assume themselves founded on divine revelation, there are those who take occasion from the effects of them to form objections of a graver kind, and of greater consequence. These men would have it believed, that all such religions are incompatible with civil sovereignty; because they introduce a private conscience that may be, and often is, contrary to the public conscience of the state; and not only set up private judgment in opposition to that of the legislature, but enforce the dictates of it by a greater authority, even by that of God himself. The Jews were unsociable members of the great commonwealth of mankind: and the same private conscience which determined them to the exercise of every kind of cruelty on other nations and other religions, made them rebels to government, even to their own,

* Vid. Calvin's Inst. l. i, c. 8.

upon some occasions, and frequently persecutors and assassins of one another. They thought themselves authorised by their religion to commit such barbarities as even they, perhaps, if they had had no religion would not have committed; and zeal for it, that is, private conscience, inspired a sanguinary rage that might be called, very justly, religious madness. To subdue those, and reduce them to a state of servitude who do not receive the Koran, is a first principle that made innumerable countries the scenes of slaughter and misery. Mahomet, who taught it, practised it; and his successors have exercised the same violence, as far as they have been able to carry their arms. But this violence is not confined to those whom they call infidels, for the sects of Omar and Aly detest each other as much as they both do Christianity; and the doctors of Mecca gave as good a bull to Miriweis to satisfy private consciences in taking arms against the sophy, as any pope ever gave to justify rebellion, and the deposition of a lawful prince.*

But to leave Judaism and Mahometism, and to speak of the Christian religion, against which the objection is particularly directed, and which I mean particularly to defend; it must be confessed, that from the time it made any figure in the world, it appeared divided into sects that even heathen persecution could not unite: and that from the time it became an established religion, it deluged the world with blood, at the suggestion, as well as under the pretence, of private conscience. Whatever sect prevailed, by ecclesiastical cabals, or by court intrigues, out of which the ladies† were not always excluded, that sect dictated one public conscience in the religion of the state. Another sect that prevailed at another time, or in another place, by much the same means, dictated another; and of this we need no other proof than the several revolutions from Athanasianism to Arianism, and from Arianism to Athanasianism. One alone could prevail at once, and as there were many, there was always a resistance of private to public conscience more or less open, and which broke out in mutiny or rebellion on one side, and in massacres and persecutions on the other, very frequently. How it happened, I know not. Let divines tell that, or rather let us forbear to pry over curiously into the secret dispositions of providence. But so it has happened, that the Christian religion has been attended by the same course of accidents as are common with it to every institution purely human. The best of these answer their

* N. B. A manuscript in the king of France's library written at the time, and on the spot, gives an account of a journey which Miriweis made to Mecca for this purpose, before he invaded Persia and dethroned the sophy.

† If Irene had a determining influence over the fathers of the second Nicæan council, there is room to think that another theological princess took part with Eusebius of Nicomedia in the first.

end in part only from the first, and whilst the impression of the force, that set them a going, lasts; and never fail to slacken afterwards, or to take new impressions from contingent events, by which they degenerate, and become insensibly new institutions under old names. A man who denies this, or who does not confess like Charron,* that "after all, nothing shows more than religion the weakness of humanity," is too ignorant, or too disingenuous to deserve an answer. But as government is not to be banished out of society, and anarchy to be introduced; because government, instead of securing the peace, and procuring the happiness of states, is often the cause of all their disorders, and of their final subversion: so neither is religion to be banished out of government, because, instead of strengthening and supporting, it serves often to weaken and to dissolve those that are the most firmly established.

What is here said of religion in general, is eminently true of Christianity in particular. Though this religion was born, if I may say so, in a desert, and educated by a sect of the most obscure people in the Roman empire, and though it seemed calculated in many instances to be rather the institution of an order of reformers, than of a national governing religion; yet no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind. If it has had a contrary effect, it has had it apparently, not really. Theology is in fault, not religion. Theology is a science that may be compared justly to the box of Pandora. Many good things lie uppermost in it; but many evil lie under them, and scatter plagues and desolation through the world. If we cannot shut the box, it is of use, however, to know that the box is open; and, to be convinced the more of this truth, let us make a general analysis of Christianity, and then observe, as generally, the rise, progress, and effects of theology.

SECTION V.

In the first place, then, Christianity is founded on the universal law of nature. I will not say that Christianity is a republication of it. But I will say that the Gospel teaches the great and fundamental principle of this law, universal benevolence; recommends the precepts of it, and commands the observation of them in particular instances occasionally, always supposes them, always enforces them, and makes the law of right reason a law in every possible definition of the word beyond all cavil. I say beyond all cavil, because a great deal of silly cavil has

* De la Sagesse.

been employed to perplex the plainest thing in nature, and the best determined signification of words according to the different occasions on which they are used.

I shall attempt, perhaps, at some other time, to expose more fully the solemn trifling that has been employed, on this subject, if what will be here said should not be thought sufficient, as I believe it ought to be.

Without entering therefore into metaphysical and logical refinements, concerning fitnesses and unfitnesses, resulting from the supposed eternal relations of things, which determine, according to some writers, the will of God himself; without amusing ourselves to distinguish between natural differences that arise in this manner, and moral differences that are said to arise from will alone, let us observe, that not only self-preservation, but a desire to be happy, are the immediate or improved effects of a natural instinct, the first in the whole animal kind, the last in the human species at least. As soon as men's appetites and passions are awake, they are determined by these to indulge every agreeable, and to abhor every disagreeable sensation; for pleasure which is temporary, and therefore not real happiness, passes for it, and is alone the object of appetite and passion. But as soon as their reason is formed, they discover the momentous difference between pleasure and happiness. Experience and reflection bring them acquainted with the system in which they are placed, and with the essential, I do not say eternal differences of things according to the constitution of it, by which some tend to their pleasure, some to their happiness, some to both, and some to neither; or to the very contrary, to pain and misery. By these consequences they distinguish natures, and on these essential differences reason establishes the principles necessary to promote and secure the human happiness of every individual in the happiness of society. These principles are called, very properly, the laws of nature; because, although it be true that the Supreme Being willed into existence this system, as he did every other, and by consequence all the relations of things contained in it, yet it is not this will that imposes in a state of nature, and among men who have no knowledge, perhaps, of their Creator; it is in truth the constitution of the system alone that imposes these laws on mankind originally, whatever power made the system, or supposing it to have been never made; and when they are thus imposed, they determine the will of our species as effectually, and oblige as strongly, as the most powerful principle of human nature can determine and oblige human creatures.

I do not say that they have their effect absolutely, nor constantly. Appetite, passion, and the force of immediate objects are often too hard for reason, even among those who hearken

the most to her voice: and no wonder they should be so, since they are too hard for revelation. If the law of nature, collected by human reason from the essential differences of things, cannot procure a perfect obedience from those who profess themselves subject to it, without the assistance of civil laws, and political institutions, nor even with this assistance; so may we see even in every Christian country, that the will of God, declared in his works, and in his word, cannot determine the rebellious will of man to conform to it in any near degree, even where it is enforced by the terrors of present, as well as future punishments, that are held out to the transgressors of it. If we consider effects, the law of nature is as much a law as the law of the gospel, and creates as really an obligation in choice to prefer good to evil. If we consider original institution and authority, it will not indeed correspond in the mind of a Stratonic philosopher with his notion of a human law imposed by will, but he will be under no necessity of applying that notion to it. He may think, and call it a law imposed on him by the operations of a superior, though unintelligent power, the course of which he cannot alter, and must therefore conform himself to it in order to be happy; and something of this kind even Grotius* was forced to allow, a little unwillingly, when he said ——— "et hæc quidem ——— locum aliquem haberent etiamsi daremus ——— non esse Deum." The morality of actions does not, I think, consist in this, that they are prescribed by will, even the will of God; but in this, they are the means, however imposed the practice of them may be, of acquiring happiness agreeable to our nature. Morality regards manners, and the conduct of human life, and therefore I see as little reason to deny that atheists may have knowledge of the morality of actions, as I do to deny that the practice of this morality is enjoined by a law in the sense of obliging and binding; for if it should be said, that it cannot pass for a law in this sense, because every man's own reason imposes it on him, and he cannot be at once the obliger and the obliged, the binder and the bound, I should think the sophism, scarce worthy of an answer; or should content myself to inform the sophister, that there may be obligation without a law by will, and a law by will without obligation, and then leave him to ponder on the matter.

But now, though the law of nature be a law in a strict and proper sense, and as really promulgated by God in his works as it would have been in his word if he had spoken to his creatures, how much wrangling soever may be made by men who frame and change definitions just as their different purposes require; yet is this law more completely, and more effectually such to a

* De Jure Belli et Pacis. Proleg. 2.

theist than to an atheist, and Mr. Bayle's famous paradox can never be received for truth by common sense, nor by good policy. The same use of sense and reason shows to both the constitution of nature, the essential differences of things, and the obligations that have the force of laws derived from thence. But the former rises from a knowledge of the phenomena to a knowledge of the God of nature, and in the law he discovers the lawgiver. The atheist sees it is his interest, the theist sees it is his duty, to observe this law, and he adores the divine wisdom and goodness that have blended together so marvellously, and so graciously, his greatest interest and his greatest duty. Every kind of knowledge, whereof our nature is capable; combines to show the theist, that God speaks to man in his works, and signifies his will by them. He can neither be in doubt whether it is God who speaks, nor be at a loss to understand the divine language. An atheist who has much imagination, much elevation of mind, and a great warmth of inward sentiment, may, perhaps, contemplate the differences of things in abstract consideration, and contrast the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice till he falls in love, if I may use the expression after Tully, with the former, and grows to abhor every appearance of the latter. He may create, in this manner, in himself, as it were, an artificial moral sense; for to assume any such natural instinct is as absurd as to assume innate ideas, or any other of the Platonic whimsies. But how much more lively must this sense be in the theist, who knows not only that virtue is the perfection of his nature, but that he conforms himself by the practice of it to the designs of infinite wisdom, and co-operates in some sort with the Almighty?

As a knowledge of the essential differences of things may lead men who know not God, to a knowledge of the morality of actions, so do these essential differences serve as so many clues by which the theist may guide himself through all the intricacies of error and of disputation, to a knowledge of the will of God. Since infinite wisdom, that must always proportion means to ends, had made happiness the end or instinctive object of all his human creatures; and has so constituted them, and the system in which he has placed them, that they can neither attain to this happiness, nor be secure in the possession of it by any other means than the practice of morality, or the social virtues; it is demonstrated, that God wills we should pursue these means to arrive at this end. We know more certainly the will of God in this way, than we can know it in any other. We may take the word of man for the word of God, and in fact this has been, and is still the case of many. But we can never mistake the works of God for the works of men, and may be therefore assured that a revelation, evidently manifested in them, is a divine revelation.

But though natural religion is an object of knowledge, and all other religions, even that of the gospel, can rest on nothing more than probability, yet may that probability be such as will and ought to force our assent. He therefore who thinks that the Christian religion is founded on such a probability, may affirm that the gospel, though he does not think it, in propriety of speech, a republication, is a confirmation of the law of nature, and renders this a law beyond all cavil about the term.

Sanctions of this law are implied in the theistical system; because it assumes, and to be sure very justly, that the general happiness, or misery, of mankind depends on the observation of this law, and that the degrees of one and the other bear always a proportion to the exercise, and to the neglect of public, and private virtue, in every community. But these motives are such as particular men will be apt to think do not immediately, nor directly concern them, because they are apt to consider themselves as individuals, rather than as members of society, and to catch at pleasure without any regard to happiness. To give an additional strength, therefore, to these motives, that are determining in their own nature, but not so according to the imperfection of ours; decisive to our reason, but not so to our appetites and passions, the ancient theists and polytheists, philosophers or legislators, invented another; that, I mean, of future rewards and punishments represented under various forms, but always directed to the same purpose. This motive every man who believes it may, and must, apply to himself, and hope the reward, and fear the punishment for his secret as well as his public actions, nay for his thoughts as well as his actions. What effect this motive had in remote antiquity we cannot say, but it had lost its force long before the institution of Christianity. The fear of hell particularly was ridiculed by some of the greatest moralists; and to show how little it was kept up in the minds of the vulgar, we may observe that Tully* treated it in some of his public pleadings as he would have avoided scrupulously to do, whatever he thought of it himself, if this fear had been at that time prevalent even among the vulgar.

Though future rewards and punishments are not original nor direct sanctions of the law of nature, because not coeval with it,

*———quid tandem illi mali mors attulit? nisi forte ineptiis et fabulis ducimur, ut existimemus apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre.———actum esse præcipitem in sceleratorum sedem atque regionem. Quæ si falsa sunt, id quod omnes intelligunt; quid ei tandem aliud mors eripuit, præter sensum doloris? pro Cluentio.———Ut aliqua in vitâ formido improbis esset posita, apud inferos ejusmodi quædam illi antiqui supplicia impiis constituta esse voluerunt: quod videlicet intelligebant, eis remotis, non esse mortem ipsam pertimescendam.—Orat. iv, in Catilin.

yet they became such when the Christian revelation was made. They are original sanctions of Christianity, and Christianity which includes, was designed to enforce, the law of nature. We may, therefore, be allowed to wonder, and to seek the reason, why the law of nature, thus enforced, has served so little to correct the manners of men, and to promote the peace and happiness of the world? Why Christianity has served, on the contrary, to determine men to violate the very law it confirms, and has opened a new source of mischief wherever it has prevailed? I said above that theology is in fault, not religion. We shall see this verified in every part of the analysis we make of Christianity. A few reflections will show it to be so in this part, where we consider the gospel as a system of natural religion.

SECTION VI.

The law of nature then, or natural religion, as it is the most important, is the plainest of all laws; and if the heavens do not declare the will, as well as the glory of God, according to an observation my Lord Bacon* makes in a chapter that contains some of the idols of the den, and of the theatre particularly, sure I am that the earth, and the inhabitants of it, declare both. The will of God has been revealed in his works to all those who have applied themselves to the contemplation of them, even to those who did not discover him in them, from the time that men have used their reason; and where reason improved, and knowledge increased, morality was carried as high in speculation, and in practice too, by some of the heathen worthies, as by any of the Christian saints; even as high as the very precept which the chancellor† quotes, and which he declares, a little rashly, to be more than human, and above the light of nature, since it was taught by some who had no other light. Notwithstanding this, divines, who cannot bear that the will, any more than the existence, of God should be deduced from his works, the clearest and the most authentic of all revelations, affirm against fact and reason both, that men may have indeed some true notions of virtue and vice, and of good and evil, by the light of nature, but that the moral law is too sublime for reason to attain to every part of it; and on this affirmation, a great deal of theological policy has been established. Thus they give too another instance of their incon-

* De Aug. Scien. Lib. 9. chap. 1.

† Diligite inimicos; benefacite his qui oderunt vos—quæ certe verba plausum illum merentur, nec vox hominem sonat; si quidem vox est, quæ lumen naturæ superat.—Ibid.

sistency, for nothing is more common than to find in their writings, nay in the course of the same argument, the religion of nature extolled as a perfect, and vilified as a most imperfect system. Had these reverend persons been content to teach the duties of natural religion with evangelical simplicity as Christ himself did in his sermon on the mount and elsewhere, they might have taught additional duties, and theological virtues apart; and they might have enforced the whole, if they had pleased, by the heaven they promised, and by the hell they threatened.

Thus they might have preserved natural religion in the genuine purity of it. Instead of perplexing and corrupting it, they might have enabled every one to be his own casuist, and have made good men as well as Christians. But this method, which would have enlarged the kingdom of God, would not have enlarged, nor fortified, the theological empire. To do this the more effectually, it was necessary to maintain the insufficiency of human reason, though God thought it so sufficient, that he left the whole race of mankind, a few partriarchs and the chosen seed excepted, several thousand years under no other conduct. It was necessary to boast the necessity of a revelation that might supply the defects of reason, though this revelation remains, and has remained, from the time it was made, unknown to the far greater part of mankind. It was necessary to make even the moral law a mystery, and such a mystery as could not be, on many occasions, unveiled without a profound knowledge of theology; which is a science that their order has imagined, and has reserved to itself. In this respect, the Christian priesthood has been wiser than the heathen. The heathen priests were wholly employed in teaching silly ceremonies, and celebrating the pompous rites of superstitious worship. They left the care of teaching the principles, and inculcating the obligations of morality to philosophers; at least in the times with which we are best acquainted, this was the state of religion among the pagans. But from the most early days of Christianity, it has not been thus in the Christian church. The persons, whom we repute commissioned to instruct others in revealed religion, have assumed the sole right of deciding in all cases concerning natural religion, that is, in almost all the most important affairs of public and private life.

By these means, and by these men, the moral law has been so intermixed with theology, and both of them have been so extended, and so perplexed, that the two plainest things in the world, and which would not have been fitted to the purpose of them, nor by consequence worthy of their author, if they had not been plain, the law of nature and the law of grace, have been rendered voluminous, intricate, and contentious to such a

degree, that the life of man is scarce long enough to attain a knowledge of them. Divines, who are supposed to have this knowledge, are therefore consulted like oracles; and till their decisions, like those of the others, and for some of the same reasons, began to lose their credit, their authority in the direction of private conscience was absolute, and extended from the prince to the peasant, who were alike under their influence. When they had decoyed mankind out of the plain into a wood, they who had planted the wood were necessary guides in it. Much ill use has been made of this authority, and much color given by it to the objection against religion, which we consider here. So much, that I apprehend there is no way to do right to Christianity, but that of imputing, as we do, consequences that cannot be denied, to the corruption of religion by theology. This corruption has gone so far, that although it be of the last absurdity to affirm, that any law can alter, much less contradict, that of nature, yet have men presumed to dispense with the observations of this law, to distinguish it away, to decide in direct opposition to it, and shamelessly to advance, that the bishop of your church, for instance, has a power to alter the very nature of things. "Jure potest contra jus decernere." Nay, Bellarmin presumed to say, that if a pope should enjoin vices and forbid virtues, the Christian church would be obliged to believe vices good and virtues evil, or would sin against conscience. "Nisi vellet contra conscientiam peccare." Bellarmin de Pont.

Moral theology, which contains a superethical doctrine, as some grave divines have ridiculously called it, rendered the system of ethics in the writings of the ancient fathers and doctors of the Christian church, more confused, less consistent, and often less moral than we find it established in those of the heathen, although no system can be more simple and plain than this of natural religion as it stands in the gospel. I do not pretend to criticise the offices of St. Ambrose, though he was a saint not very unlike our Becket; but I will suppose that no man presumes to compare them, in any respect, to those of Tully; and I will advance that Tully would have blushed to own some of the moral doctrines of St. Austin, though St. Austin was, after St. Paul, the great author of theological systems. This abuse of reason, and of revelation both, was never pushed so extravagantly, however, as it was by the school divines. These men, who sate ruminating in their cells on the very little they knew by experience and observation, and whose minds, therefore, were void of the true materials of knowledge, worked up, in place of them, all the "entia rationis," chimeras of imagination that have no subsistence out of it, and pass under the name of metaphysics; all the useless definitions, frivolous distinctions,

vain subtleties, and captious argumentations of logic. By them, casuistry came into vogue, which has been called in French "l'art de chicaner avec Dieu:" as logic has been called "l'art de chicaner avec les hommes;" and we may call the whole tribe, as Buchanan called the Scotch and Irish scholastics particularly,

"Gens ratione furens, et mentem pasta chimæris."

Some divines have made men enthusiasts, by straining the obligations of natural and revealed religion both so high, that they become almost inconceivable, and quite impracticable. Others again, scholastic divines and casuists especially, have so relaxed all these, and taught men so many ways of compounding, as it were, with God, that they are left at liberty, on many occasions, to indulge the excess of their passions. According to the first, a good Christian is an ideal man that never existed out of idea, as much as the sage of the Stoics. According to the last, the worst of men may be good Christians on earth, and saints in heaven. In short, they have divided the two laws that are intimately united in the gospel, have set them in opposition, and have very often made the violations of one pass for lawful means of promoting the other. The natural effect of religion is to help reason to subdue our passions, and of theology to help the passions to subdue reason and religion both, not only by indulgence to them, but by irritating the worst and most furious of them. History is full of such examples; and irreligious persons make use of them, unjustly, against Christianity.

SECTION VII.

There are two other parts besides this of natural religion, into which Christianity may be analysed, and which have been corrupted alike by theology. Duties superadded to those of the former, and articles of belief that reason neither could discover, nor can comprehend. As impracticable as some, and as incredible as others may seem, the duties required to be practised, and the propositions required to be believed are concisely and plainly enough expressed in the gospel, in the original gospel properly so called, which Christ taught, and which his four evangelists recorded. But they have been rendered, since they were first published, and they began to be so soon as they were published, extremely voluminous and intricate. The duties, external duties at least, have been multiplied by ecclesiastical policy, that profited of the natural superstition of mankind. The articles of belief have been multiplied, and complicated by cabalistical notions taken from the Jews, and by metaphysical refinements

taken from heathen theology. Children suffer often for the sins of their fathers. But in this case, the rule is inverted. The gospel gave birth to Christian theology, and the gospel suffers for the sins of her licentious offspring; of that ecclesiastical order, I mean, who, affecting to be called the religious, have proved themselves to be the most irreligious society that ever was formed, and the most hurtful too, as he who compares, through the whole series of their own history, the little good, with the infinite mischief they have done, must confess.

It is common, and yet astonishing, to observe with how much solemnity and confidence almost all those, who teach and defend Christianity, presume to affirm any thing, though never so evidently false, that they imagine may serve to recommend it, and how by these means they do hurt, even where they intend to do good. They do hurt, most certainly, to the cause of religion; and the end is, in this case, so far from sanctifying the means, that the means disgrace the end. One artifice that they employ continually, is to confound, as much as they can, the want of power in the heathen world to reform the manners of men, by promoting effectually the practice of natural religion, and the want of a sufficient knowledge of this religion. That the heathen sages wanted this power is true, and that the apostles, saints, and doctors of Christianity have not had it, even with the help of a particular revelation, is true likewise; but it is as false to say the former had not a sufficient knowledge of natural religion, as it would be to say that Christians have it not. The great book of nature lies open before us, and our natural reason enables us to read in it. Whatever it may contain, that cannot be thus read, cannot be called natural religion with any precision of ideas, or propriety of words; nor will the example, that has been brought, of men who assent readily to truths consonant to their reason, which they receive from others, and would have found it hard to discover themselves, be made applicable to the present case, so as to destroy the distinction. Mr. Locke should have seen this sooner than any man, and one would think a reflection so obvious should escape no man. He did not, or he would not, make it. He seems to me, in the latter part of his treatise concerning the reasonableness of Christianity, not only to confound the want of sufficient means to propagate, and the want of sufficient means to know the religion of nature, but to play so loosely in his expressions between this religion and the Christian, that it is hard to distinguish sometimes what he intends; whether he intends means of propagating or means of knowing; to what sense he confines natural, and to what revealed religion. Thus much, however, is very clear: he asserts

the insufficiency of "human reason, unassisted by revelation, in its great and proper business of morality." Human reason, he says, "never made out an entire body of the law of nature from unquestionable principles, or by clear deductions. Scattered sayings—incoherent apophthegms of philosophers and wise men—could never make a morality—could never rise to the force of law." These assertions now are in part, and in part only, true. But when he comes to contrast this supposed imperfect knowledge of the religion of nature, which the heathen had, with that supposed perfect knowledge which is communicated by the gospel, what he advances stands in direct contradiction to truth. It is not true, that Christ revealed an entire body of ethics, proved to be the law of nature from principles of reason, and reaching all the duties of life. If mankind wanted such a code, to which recourse might be had on every occasion, as to an unerring rule in every part of the moral duties, such a code is still wanting; for the gospel is not such a code. Moral obligations are occasionally recommended and commanded in it, but no where proved from principles of reason, and by clear deductions, unless allusions, parables, and comparisons, and promises, and threats, are to pass for such. Were all the precepts of this kind, that are scattered about in the whole New Testament, collected like the short sentences of ancient sages in the memorials we have of them, and put together in the very words of the sacred writers, they would compose a very short, as well as unconnected system of ethics. A system thus collected from the writings of ancient heathen moralists, of Tully, of Seneca, of Epictetus, and others, would be more full, more entire, more coherent, and more clearly deduced from unquestionable principles of knowledge. Nor must we think that this takes off from the dignity, the authority, or the utility, even in moral doctrines, of revealed religion. The law of nature was sufficiently known, and the teachers of it, who made no pretence to any divine mission, had pressed it on the minds and consciences of mankind, the sole way they could press it, by arguments drawn from the reason of things. Revelation was not given to do what reason could do alone. It was not given to convince men of the reasonableness of morality, but to enforce the practice of it by a superior authority.

If there was any thing like a complete system of morality in the gospel, we should find it in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. Matthew, since they contain a sermon preached by Christ himself, not on any one particular doctrine, but on the whole duty of man. What now do we find in them? Many excellent precepts of morality, no doubt, intermingled with and enforced by several considerations drawn from his own revela-

tions, and yet such as the laws of nature enjoins, or implies, and as have been practised by philosophers, and other good men among the heathens. Some of these, and some others that we find interspersed in the gospel, are such as may be reckoned of the kind of those St Austin calls "sublimiora præcepta," not so much positive duties, as instances of greater purity and Christian perfection, and rather recommended than commanded. Thus, for instance, wherever marriage has been instituted, adultery has been forbidden. It was so by the Mosaic law, it is so by the law of nature; for though marriage be not directly instituted by this law, yet every wrong, every invasion of another man's property, and every injustice is forbidden by it. Now the gospel carries this duty much farther, and declares, that "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." The law that forbids the commission of a crime, does certainly imply that we should not desire to commit it; for to want the desire, or to be able to extinguish it, is the best security of our obedience; though he who is unable to extinguish it, and yet abstains from the sin, has in the eye of reason a greater degree of merit. Reason commanded what a man may by the force of reason perform. Revelation commands what it is impossible to obey, without an assistance unknown to reason. Thus again murder is forbidden by the law of nature, but even anger is forbidden by this; and universal benevolence, that great principle of the first, is strained by the last to a love of our enemies and persecutors: a precept so sublime, that I doubt whether it was ever exactly observed any more under the law of grace, than under the law of nature, though some appearances of it may be found, perhaps, under both, and at least as many under one as under the other. These sublime precepts, which are peculiarly Christian, and seem designed to characterise Christianity, have not been observed by the professors of it, either ancient, or modern. The Quaker who says yea yea, and nay nay, and doth not swear at all, does not willingly part with his coat as well as his cloak, nor give away one because the other has been taken from him; neither does the good man neglect to lay up some treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. It has occurred to me often, that the same reason may be given to the sublime precepts, which Tully gives somewhere for the severer doctrines of the Stoics. Men will always stop short of that pitch of virtue which is proposed to them, and it is therefore right to carry the notions of it as high as possible. Whether this reason will be admitted or no, I cannot tell. It seems to me the best that can be given, "et valeat quantum valere potest." In

all cases these sublime precepts are so little inconsistent with the law of nature, that they are this very law carried beyond the original terms of it.

There are besides these general duties, and others of the same kind, commanded or recommended by the gospel, some that seem directed to the Jews only, and some that seem directed more immediately to the disciples of Christ. Of the first sort is that injunction which restrains divorces to the case of adultery; whereas, by the law of Moses, as well as by those of other legislators, a man who did not like his wife, nor care to cohabit with her, might give her a letter of divorce, and turn her out of his doors; for which express leave is given in Deuteronomy.* Of the same sort are those directions which tend to render the worship of God more intellectual, and the practice of good works less ostentatious. The heathen fasted and prayed, and exercised charity as well as the Jews. But the divine worship of both consisted in a multitude of external duties, and in pompous rites and ceremonies; and the Jews are taxed particularly with hypocrisy, and with an affectation of doing acts of charity in public, in the streets, and the synagogues, in order to gratify their vanity, and to be applauded by the public. Of the second sort are certain duties enjoined in this sermon, and in other parts of the gospel, which seem fit enough for a religious sect, or order of men like the Essenians, but are by no means practicable in the general society of mankind. To resist no injury, to take no care for to-morrow, to neglect providing for the common necessaries of life, and to sell all to follow Christ, might be properly exacted from those who were his companions, and his disciples in a stricter sense, like the scholars of Pythagoras, admitted within the curtain; but reason and experience both show that, considered as general duties, they are impracticable, inconsistent with natural instinct, as well as law, and quite destructive of society. They have not been therefore considered as such. They have been laid aside, and nothing more than a pretended observation of them has been kept up by some of the monastic orders.

If this now be, as it is most certainly, a true, though general and short representation of the moral duties contained in the gospel, and added to those of natural religion, both which consist in piety towards God, and benevolence towards man, will any disciple of the philosopher of Malmesbury presume to maintain, that the objection raised against religion has the least force on account of them, or that they render it inconsistent with civil sovereignty? He who should maintain it, would fall below notice, and not deserve an answer. But if the objection be

* Chap. xxiv.

levelled against the numberless duties superadded to those of the gospel, instead of being levelled against the few that have been superadded by the gospel to those of natural religion, it will be unanswerable. Those of the former sort have been so increased, especially in matters of rites, of ceremonies, and of external devotion, by the authority of the church, and in the course of ages, that they overload and stifle, as it were, true religion; nay, that they substitute in lieu of it a carnal religion, such as that of the Jews, and those of paganism were. That the religion instituted by Moses was such in outward appearance, "in frontispicio quidem," says Spencer, our divines admit. But they assert that inwardly, "in penetrali," it was divine and mystic. The heathen said the same of theirs: and, in truth, if theirs were not very divine, they were very mystical. Christianity has completed the round, and has been brought back in many countries, at least, from the simplicity of the gospel, to the pageantry and superstition of heathen and Jewish observances.

The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper are certainly divine ceremonies, since they were instituted by Christ himself; and they may be said to be mystical too, because they are intended to be visible signs of something invisible. Baptism, or washing, is necessary to cleanliness and health, in warm countries especially. But it was soon adopted by those who instituted religions, and applied it to inward, as well as outward purification. It was so among the heathen, it was so among the Jews, it is so at this day among the idolaters in the Indostan, and among the Mahometans. The heathen had their public and private purifications, and we know, by other proofs besides the acknowledgment of St. Austin, that baptism was one of them. We know too, that the pagan ceremonies of purification had a spiritual meaning, and were intended to keep up a sense of religion in the minds of men. "Castè jubet lex adire ad deos," says Tully,* "animo videlicet——nec tollit castimoniam corporis." The Jews employed several kinds of baptism. They baptised even their household goods. Every kind had a mystical signification, and the proselytes to the law of Moses, who were baptised as well as circumcised, were understood to be regenerated as well as purified. The proselyte became a new man by this ceremony, retained nothing of his former state, and even his parents ceased to be reputed such. The precursor of Christ instituted a baptism of repentance; and even Christ himself, who had not certainly any need of repentance, insisted to be baptised in the Jordan, as he was after some modest resistance on the part of John. He was not only baptised before he began his mission, but he instituted this ceremony at the close of it, when he ordered

* Lib. 2. De Legib.

his disciples to "baptise all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

The communion of the sacrament of the Lord's supper is another, and the only other, religious ceremony instituted by the same divine authority. We hear something of symbols of bread, and symbols of the cup, which cup was of water, that were used in the mysteries of Mithras, and in others. There is, I think, no room to suspect that the Christian communion bore any allusion to those rites in its institution, whatever it did afterwards. But the Jews had their passover, and in imitation of that feast, as well as on occasion of it, Christ instituted his supper. One was designed to preserve the memory of the exode, before which a destroying angel passed over the houses of the Israelites, and put the first born of the Egyptians to death. The other was designed to preserve the memory of the death of Christ, which was then near, which he assured his disciples had been foretold by the prophets, and would be effectual to the redemption of mankind, and to the remission of sin. No institutions can be imagined more simple, nor more void of all those pompous rites and theatrical representations that abounded in the religious worship of the heathen and the Jews, than these two were in their origin. They were not only innocent, but profitable ceremonies, because they were extremely proper to keep up the spirit of true natural religion, by keeping up that of Christianity, and to promote the observation of moral duties, by maintaining a respect for the revelation that confirmed them. But they were soon perverted by the fathers of the church, who trusted so little to the providence of God for the propagation of this religion, that they employed the lowest tricks of human policy for the purpose. They added another stage of external observances, if I may say so, in the progress of converts to Christianity, and modelled the ceremonies of it on the plan of those heathen mysteries, against which they declaimed so bitterly; for the good men were apt to be bitter, as well as inconsistent. Baptism was the ceremony of purgation that preceded initiation. Neither children nor others were admitted to it, till by exorcisms, and the blowing of the priest upon them, the impure spirits were driven from them. Blowing was the first, washing the second part of this purgation. They who had gone through both were fitted to receive the influences of grace. They were the catechumens, the initiated, who partook of the first and least mysteries: and the complete or perfect Christians were those, who not only partook of the greatest, the communion, but were let into the whole secret of it. This third stage was that of consummation, according to Christian as well as heathen theology: and it would scarce be possible to believe, that the greatest saints and doctors of the church had talked so much blasphemous nonsense, and employ-

ed so much artifice about it, if their writings were not extant, and if we did not see in them, that deification in another life was promised to those who received the Christian sacraments with faith; as it had been promised to those who went piously through all the mysterious ceremonies of heathenism. It would be scarce possible to believe that even Athanasius, as well known as he is by his creed and by other circumstances, could have had the front to assert, that men are united to the Godhead by a participation of the spirit, "participatione spiritûs conjungimur deitati;" which participation is the effect of these sacraments, of that particularly, which was called "magnum et pavendum mysterium," and the sacarment "eminentiæ gratia," as it was then, and as it is at this hour. It would be tedious to descend into a greater detail here. If you have a mind at any time to do so, you may consult, among other writings, the sixteenth exercitation of Casaubon against Baronius, where you will find enough to satisfy your curiosity, and more than enough to raise your surprise. All I shall say more concerning these two religious ceremonies, instituted by Christ, is this; baptism has been kept at no very great distance from the simplicity of its original, and the little alteration that has been made, leaving it as much a sign as it was before, and, no doubt, as effectual as it was before to every other purpose, renders the ceremony more decent by sprinkling only with water, according to the practice of the western churches, than it would be by a total immersion, according to that of the primitive church, and of the oriental churches, if I mistake not, even at this time. But the other institution has been so disguised by ornament, and so much directed, in your church at least, to a different purpose from commemoration, that, if the disciples were to assemble at Easter in the chapel of his holiness, Peter would know his successor as little as Christ would acknowledge his vicar, and the rest would be unable to guess what the ceremony represented, or intended.

It would be still more tedious to descend into an enumeration of all the impositions, which the church has laid on the Christian world. New powers, new rights, new duties, new sins, new ceremonies, new observances to be practised from the birth to the death of every man, all tending to the profit of the clergy, none founded on the plain authority, and many established in direct contradiction to the spirit, and to the letter of the gospel. Judaism and paganism gave occasion to them. They were derived from thence. They are no parts of the Christian system: Christ had no share in their institution. The manner indeed in which the gospel was published, and much more the manner in which it was propagated, might lead designing, enthusiastical, and superstitious men, to graft all these foreign branches on the

stock of genuine Christianity. Christ himself was, in outward appearance, a Jew. He ordered his disciples, and the crowds that followed him, to observe and do whatever the Scribes and Pharisees, who sat in the chair of Moses, should direct.* He only warned them against the examples that these men gave, who did not practise what they taught, "dicunt enim et non faciunt." He was a better Jew than they, and he exhorted others to be the same. It is true that he commissioned his apostles to teach and baptise all nations,† when he gave them his last instructions. But he meant no more, perhaps, by all nations, than the Jews dispersed into all nations, since he had before that time forbid them to go into the ways of the Gentiles, and into the cities of the Samaritans.‡ He sent them rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and declared this in a very remarkable manner to be the object of his own mission, by the language he held to the Canaanite woman. She endeavored in vain to move his compassion. He told her it was not fit to take the bread of the children and give it to the dogs:§ nor did he relent and cure her daughter till he was overcome by her importunity and her faith.

These declarations of Jesus before his crucifixion, and the charge he gave to his disciples after his resurrection, might embarrass them a little, and might cause some difference of opinion among them at their first setting out. So it happened: and though a predilection for the Jews, and a strong attachment to the observances of the law might have been expected from St. Paul, a zealous Pharisee, who had been bred at the feet of Gamaliel, rather than from St. Peter, a poor ignorant fisherman; yet St. Paul distinguished himself as the apostle of the Gentiles, and alleged, that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto him, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter.‖ It is probable that the first had made a reflection early, and had seen it confirmed by experience as soon as he entered on his apostolical mission, that escaped the second. The reflection I mean is this, that the contempt and aversion in which both the nation and the religion of the Jews were held by the rest of mankind, would make it much more easy to convert the Gentiles at once to Christianity, than to make them Jews first, in order to make them Christians afterwards. The council of the apostles and the elders at Jerusalem, to which Paul and Barnabas were deputed from Antioch, where the dispute about circumcising the Gentile converts had been carried even into mutiny, was of the same mind. Nay St. Peter¶ himself spoke on that side of the

* Matt. chap. xxiii. † Ibid. xxviii. ‡ Ibid. x.
§ Ibid. xv. ‖ Gal. ii. ¶ Acts xv.

question, how much soever he trimmed when St. Paul withstood him to his face,* and reproved him for his dissimulation, and the bad example he gave.

It is evident, that indulgence to the Jews and to the Gentiles, in order to gain both, was a fundamental principle of apostolical conduct from the first preaching of the gospel. Peter conversed and eat with the Gentiles at Antioch, till the arrival of certain Jews made him separate himself from the former, fearing them which were of the circumcision: and Paul, who reproached this prince of the apostles so harshly for his hypocrisy, if he did not dissemble to the elders the doctrine he taught to the Gentiles, did at least dissemble so far to the public, when he came to Jerusalem and joined in the most solemn act, that the most rigid observers of the law could perform, as to express a zeal for observances he did not much value, and for a law he thought abrogated; for that was the case, and that doctrine is inculcated throughout his epistles. In short, he carried his indulgence so far, or he dissembled so far, that he became as a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews, and to them that are without law, that is, to the Gentiles, as without law, that he might gain them too.† We have his own word for this, and he boasts of it.

By such prudent conduct, the gospel was successfully propagated, and converts flocked apace into the pale of Christianity from these different and opposite quarters; from which it is no wonder that they brought along with them several of their former usages, rites, and ceremonies.

Abstinence from things strangled and from blood had been constantly observed by the Jews, and was one of the conditions imposed by the Christian church on the Gentiles received into it. This condition was confirmed by the apostolical constitutions, and enforced, I believe, by penalties more severe, in some of the imperial. It remained long in general practice among the Christians of the east, and is perhaps even now practised by several of those churches. But in the west it was soon abandoned, and will not be revived again by the zeal of our acquaintance Dr. Delany. Abstinence likewise from all kinds of nourishment, or the most rigorous fasting on solemn occasions, had been observed in the Jewish church, and is observed still by the Christian churches of the east; for as to those of the west, they cannot be said to fast, when their manner is compared with that of the others, or with that of the Mahometans: they may be said rather to feast very often, and only to change one kind of luxury for another.

These observances were of mere Pagan or Jewish original.

* Gal. ii. † 1 Cor. chap. ix.

Others were of a mixed kind. Moses had made the destruction of idolatrous worship a principle object of his law; and the zeal against images was great among the Jews. But they made a distinction, which the casuists of the upper Egypt did not make, I presume, formerly; and which those of Mecca would not admit now. Images carved or embossed were held in horror, but a flat figure, either painted or embroidered, was allowed. A passage which I have read, quoted from Maimonides,* is very express and very clear on this subject. Pictures being thus introduced from Judaism, statues soon followed from the Pagan worship: and the westerm churches, if not the eastern, who kept more nearly to the Jewish customs, were furnished like heathen temples. Confession of sins was in use among the heathen, so it was among the Jews, so it was, and so it is, among Christians, and several forms of it have been prescribed. Penance and expiation followed both in the Pagan and Jewish churches: they were derived into the Christian, and they have been often costly in all three. One sort of penance obtained in the two last indeed, which I do not remember to have obtained in the first, that of flagellation: a sort of penance which has been since applied, as the learned Meibomius assures us, to a very different and unholy purpose. In the synagogue it is said, that the penitents flogged one another, but your church, like a more indulgent mother, allows every one to flog himself, and to proportion the penance to the tenderness of his conscience, and the tenderness of his skin.

But to what purpose should I mention any more of these particulars? A multitude of such ceremonies, not to say superstitious rites, have been adopted by the Christian church, though neither commanded, nor even recommended by the gospel. For this reason, the apostles do not seem to have been very intent about these, or any other forms of external service. They seem to have distinguished rightly between the end and the means: the end immutable, as a religion given by God must necessarily be: the discipline, or means of supporting it, mutable, as the ordinances of men must be, according to the vicissitude of circumstances, and the fluctuation of human affairs. But their successors did, and have done ever since, the very reverse of this, and it is astonishing to observe what a bustle they made, and what contests they had about the time of keeping Easter, and other points of discipline and ceremony which the apostles had not thought of importance enough to deserve their decision, nor even

* Lud. com ad hist. Æthiop. Sed hoc capiendum de imagine, quæ protuberat, quales sunt figuræ ac sculpturæ in palatiis, et his similes. Talem igitur si quis fecerit, vapulat. Sin autem figura sit depressa, vel coloribus expressa, uti illæ, quæ in tabulis mensisvè fiunt aut quæ intextæ operi textorio, pro licitis habentur.

their notice. All these fluctuated therefore extremely in the same churches, and varied in different churches, during the first ages of Christianity, and especially until the synagogue was honorably buried,* if it can be said to be so even at this day. I interpose this doubt, not only because there remains a tang of Judaism among several of the eastern sects, which will not appear strange to those who know that the Christian church of Jerusalem Judaised during a succession of fifteen bishops, but because the western sect, your pretended Catholic church, instead of asserting evangelical freedom from the bondage of the Mosaical law, or rather whilst she asserts it, has introduced many things from this very law, and has the front to justify them on the authority of it, under a new dispensation that takes all authority from it, according to St. Paul. Ointment, holy water, incense, tapers, the consecration of altars, and the celebration of jubilees, are of this kind. But I think that your doctors would not sound so high this authority, if these things were alone concerned. There are others which import them more, and which they have been obliged to establish on Jewish authority, for want of any better; and it is for the sake of such institutions that they have deemed it expedient to accustom men to respect this authority on other occasions, on such particularly as relate to the immediate service of God, of which custom, not reason nor revelation most certainly, has made them to pass for essential parts. The divine right of tithes was established by the law of Moses. By virtue of that law, the Christian priesthood claim it. The nasci was the pontiff of the Jews, and the head of their church. From hence an argument the more for the supreme authority of the pope. Councils are derived from the sanhedrin, and the whole system of the heirarchy and of ecclesiastical regimen from the constitution of the Jewish church. I take no notice here of the share which Paganism had in all that has been mentioned, either immediately or mediately through Judaism. Enough is said for my present purpose: and observations of that sort will be more necessary under another head.

Let those now, who object to religion on account of external duties, rites, ceremonies, and ecclesiastical institutions, learn to be more just in their censures. Let them learn to distinguish rightly between those things which the gospel requires, and those which the church imposes. If they do not make this distinction, their objections are trifling, and if they do make it, they may have the concurrence of every sincere and intelligent Christian along with them; for reasons which are not theirs indeed, since

* ———Donec synagoga honorificè sepulta fuerit.—Card. Bon. de rebus litur. l. 1.

they are intended to strengthen and confirm, not to weaken nor explode religion. When we consider how strong the impressions of sense are, and how they are apt to control that which should control them, we may find, perhaps, very sufficient reason to incline us to approve in general the use of ceremonies and the pomp of external service in religion. To keep up a sense of it in the minds of men, there seem to be but two ways. To strike the senses frequently by public and solemn acts of religious worship, and to heat the brain by notions of an inward operation of the spirit, and of a sort of mystical devotion independent of outward forms, or even inconsistent with them. One of these leads to superstition, the other to enthusiasm. Both are silly; but the last is bad in this respect: it is less governable and less curable. Superstition is folly. Enthusiasm is madness. It is good to be on our guard against both. But I am to speak in this place of the first alone, and as to that, the solemn magnificence of a church, the grave and moving harmony of music, the pomp and order of ceremonies decently performed, the composed looks, and the mystical vestments of the priests who perform them, all this, I think, cannot fail to inspire an awful respect, and to maintain a devout attention of mind in the generality. Here and there a man, perhaps, may take these ceremonies, and those who perform them, for what they are, and not be imposed upon by them, either before or after the celebration of such rites as these. But during the celebration of them, whilst the spectacle is before his eyes, and the sound in his ears, I think that the same impressions will be made in some degree even on such a man as this. You and I knew Betterton and Mrs. Barry off the stage, as well as on it, and yet I am persuaded neither of us could ever see Jaffier and Belvidera without horror and compassion. I do not pretend to decide in the dispute about the pomp of external service. I only speak according to what I have felt. But though I do not take part, on the whole, for the use or disuse of church ceremonies, it may be allowed me to declare against the abuse of them all, as a friend, not as an enemy to religion. It is certain that this abuse has defeated the very end to which they were directed, or which served as a reason for the introduction of them, and has substituted something, which is not religion, in the place of it. Our spiritual guides have run into very wild extremes. Some have showed a great disregard to good works, and have talked of justifying faith alone, as the sole means of salvation, and in contradistinction to good works, like the Scotch Presbyterian parson, who assured his brethren from the pulpit, that immorality had destroyed its thousands, but morality its ten thousands. Others have insisted much on good works, but they have confounded the nature of them. They have rather meant,

by good works, the practice of arbitrary duties, which ecclesiastical discipline has established, or ecclesiastical authority recommended, and which are beggarly elements indeed, than the practice of those moral duties which reason prescribes as well as revelation. How much they prefer the former to the latter, may appear by the universal practice of most Christian countries. In some, the man who stabs his enemy goes to confession, and his conscience is never at quiet till he has purchased absolution by money, or by penance, or by both. The woman who lies in the arms of her adulterer will leap out of bed, and knock her forehead, and beat her breast, at the tinkling of a little bell in the street. Nay in the country where I have passed so many years of my life, where bigotry is less prevalent, generally speaking, than in others of the same communion, the poor man who has eat an egg in lent, when eggs have not been permitted by the bishop, and who had perhaps nothing else to eat, cannot be absolved of this heinous sin by the same priest that might absolve him for neglecting the worship, or offendiug against the law of God. The former sin is of a blacker dye than these, and he must have recourse for absolution to a higher authority; which is an imitation of the Jews likewise, among whom any offence against the ritual law was punished more severely than crimes much more grievous in their nature, as I believe it has been observed already after Dr. Spencer. But enough has been said concerning duties added by the gospel to natural religion, and duties added by the church to those of both. It is time to speak of articles of faith, which make a third and last part of the analysis of Christianity.

SECTION VIII.

It is this part that has furnished matter of strife, contention, and all uncharitableness, even in, as well as from, the apostolical age. It is this that has added a motive the more, and one that is stronger than any other, to animosity and hatred, to wars and massacres, and to that cruel principle which was never known till Christians introduced it into the world, to persecution for opinions, for opinions often of the most abstract speculation, and of the least importance to civil or religious interests. It is this, in short, whose effects have been so fatal to the peace and happiness of mankind, that nothing which the enemies of religion can say on the subject will be exaggerated beyond the truth. But still the charge they bring will be unjustly brought. These effects have not been caused by the gospel, but by the system

raised upon it. Not by the revelations of God, but by the inventions of men. We distinguished before between the original and the traditional proofs, and we must distinguish here between the original and traditional matter of these revelations. The gospel of Christ is one thing, the gospel of St. Paul, and of all those who have grafted after him on the same stock, is another.

I will not say, that one article of belief alone is necessary to make men Christians, the belief that Jesus was the Messiah promised to the Jews, and foretold by their prophets. This may be the primary, but it is not the sole object of our faith. There are other things doubtless contained in the revelation he made of himself, dependent on, and relative to this article, without the belief of which I suppose that our Christianity would be very defective. But this I say; the articles of belief, which Christ himself exacted by what he said, and by what he did, have been lengthened immeasurably, and we may add both unnecessarily and presumptuously by others since his time. The system of religion, which Christ published, and his evangelists recorded, is a complete system to all the purposes of true religion, natural and revealed. It contains all the duties of the former, it enforces them by asserting the divine mission of the publisher, who proved his assertions at the same time by his miracles, and it enforces the whole law of faith by promising rewards, and threatening punishments, which he declares he will distribute when he comes to judge the world. Besides which, if we do not acknowledge the system of belief and practice, which Jesus, the finisher as well as author of our faith, left behind him to be in the extent in which he revealed and left it, complete and perfect, we must be reduced to the grossest absurdity, and to little less than blasphemy.

These reasons, which cut up the root of artificial theology, deserve, for that reason, to be more fully explained. If we do not acknowledge them, we assume that the Son of God, who was sent by the Father to make a new convenant with mankind, and to establish a spiritual kingdom on the ruins of paganism, and the reformation at least of Judaism, executed his commission imperfectly; we assume, that he died to redeem mankind from sin, and from death the wages of sin, but that he left them at the same time without sufficient information concerning that faith in him, and that obedience to his law, which could alone make this redemption effectual to all the gracious purposes of it; since we might rise to immortality indeed by the merits of his passion, but this resurrection might be to damnation too, unless an entire faith in him, co-operating with our imperfect obedience, justified and saved us. In short, we assume, that they who were converted to Christianity by Christ himself, and who died before the sup-

posed imperfection of his revelation had been supplied by the apostles, by Paul particularly, lived and died without a sufficient knowledge of the terms of salvation, than which nothing can be said more abominable. Natural religion may be collected, slowly, perhaps, though sufficiently by natural reason, from the works of God, wherein he manifests his will to mankind. But a religion, revealed by God himself immediately, must have been complete and perfect from the first promulgation in the mind of every convert to it, according to all our ideas of order: and if we consider it as a covenant of grace, the covenant must have been made at once, according to all these ideas, and all those of justice. No new articles of belief, no new duties, could be made necessary to salvation afterwards, without changing the covenant: and at that rate how many new covenants might there not be? How often, I say it with horror, might not God change his mind?

Will it be urged, as an answer to what has been said, that the explanations and additions, which have been made, were made by the same authority that made the original covenant, in order to ascertain the terms, and to secure the effect of it, and that there is therefore no reason to find fault that they were made? But if this should be said, instead of removing one absurdity and profanation, it will only serve to advance another. The force of the objection rests on the very assertion contained in the answer, on the sameness of the authority. If the additions were not said to be made by the same authority, they would be entitled to little regard, and the objection would vanish. But since they are said to be so made, and since they make a change in the covenant, for a covenant is changed by additional conditions, though the original remain still in force, the objection is confirmed by the answer: and a farther absurdity arises from it, or the same absurdity appears in a new light. If it was necessary that the apostles, who were filled with the Holy Ghost, or other inspired persons, should publish by the assistance of the spirit any knowledge necessary to salvation, which Jesus had not taught, or explain the covenant of grace more perfectly than he had done, it follows that the third person of the Trinity was employed to assist the second in making a more full and perfect publication of the gospel, which comes too near the case of poor mortals, who want this assistance to receive and practise the gospel as they ought, and to whom it is given to supply the imperfection of their nature. Upon the whole, have we not reason to distinguish with an holy fear between the original system of Christianity, and the very best, if that could be ascertained, of all those discordant systems into which the pure ore of the gospel has been so often melted down and cast anew, during seventeen centuries, at different times, and every time with such a mixture

of human alloy, that no one of them can carry, without fraud, the image and superscription of our heavenly Cæsar?

Christianity, as it stands in the gospel, contains not only a complete but a very plain system of religion; it is, in truth, the system of natural religion, and such it might have continued to the unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was originally taught by Christ himself. But this could not have happened, unless it had pleased the divine providence to preserve the purity of it by constant interpositions, and by extraordinary means sufficient to alter the ordinary course of things. Such a constant interposition, and such extraordinary means, not being employed, Christianity was left very soon to shift for itself, in the midst of a frantic world, and in an age when the most licentious reasonings and the most extravagant superstitions, in opinion and practice, prevailed universally under the respectable names of theology and metaphysics; and when the Jews themselves, on whose religion, and on the authority of whose Scriptures Christianity was founded, had already gone far in corrupting both, by oral traditions and cabalistical whimsies, by a mixture of notions taken from the Chaldaic philosophy during their captivity, and from the Grecian philosophy since the expedition of Alexander. The traces of these mixtures are discernible. Those of Greek origin most manifestly; and among them those of Platonism are so strongly marked, that it is impossible to mistake them. This philosophy was the very quintessence of the theology and metaphysics, which Plato, and Pythagoras before him, had imported into Greece. It had been extracted by the intense heat of the warmest imagination that ever Greece produced, and had contributed more than any other system of Paganism to turn theists into enthusiasts, and to confirm that fondness for mystery, without an air of which no doctrine could pass for divine. What effect all these circumstances had on Christianity, and how they served to raise an intricate, voluminous, and contentious science on foundations of the greatest simplicity and plainness, it may be worth while to examine more particularly, and in such a detail as the nature of these essays, which are not designed to be treatises, and my confined knowledge of antiquity permit. The extent of one and the other will be sufficient, perhaps, for our purpose.

SECTION IX.

Men have accustomed themselves to talk so vaguely about mysteries, that the very meaning of the word is become a mys-

tery. The whole New Testament has been called the gospel, and the whole gospel a mystery. Both very improperly; for the first confounds what should be always distinguished in favor of the original system of Christianity: and the second is absurd in the highest degree, since nothing can be conceived to be more so than to predicate two contradictory terms of the same subject. To affirm that a thing is and is not existent at the same time, is just as reasonable as to affirm, that the gospel is at once a revelation and a mystery, a thing shown and a thing hidden. That there are many ambiguous expressions, and many dark sayings, in the gospel, that there are many doctrines, which reason would never have taught, nor is able to comprehend now they are taught, cannot be denied. Nay the utmost human endeavors have been, and must be always, employed in vain to reduce the entire plan of divine wisdom in the mission of Christ, and the redemption of man, to a coherent, intelligible, and reasonable system of doctrines and facts. Is it strange that it should be so? It could not be otherwise. Two of the evangelists recorded, as witnesses, what they saw and heard in this extraordinary conjuncture, and two others what they were told about it. Not the whole indeed; for then the world could not have contained the books that would have been written, but as much as was necessary, and even a little more than was strictly so, to account for the establishment of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, as it is called improperly enough, and to explain the laws of it, and the conditions of admission into it. If a great prince should arise in any country, and make an entire revolution in the constitution of it, reform some, and abolish others of the ancient laws and customs, and establish a new government on new principles of government, would it not be sufficient for the people to know his right in general, and the measures of their obedience in particular? Would they complain, if some things essential to neither, and scarce relative to the latter, were obscurely mentioned in any of his declarations or constitutions, that they wanted a complete system of the government to which they submitted themselves, and were therefore obliged to supply on their own authority what they had not received on the authority of their legislator. I think they would make no such complaint. Reasonable men I am sure would not. To such, the whole would appear plain enough, and they would resolve to believe and obey it in the obvious and literal sense, whilst a few busy, over-curious, and designing politicians might render what was plain, intricate, and two or three dark expressions the subject of perpetual dispute, and irreconcilable division, by their refinements. Thus the peace of society might be broken, and the very end of government be defeated, not by any want of necessary information,

but by an affectation of knowing more than the legislator thought it necessary that they should know. Such as I have represented these politicians in civil government, such have divines and metaphysicians shown themselves in religion: and it is full as unjust to charge the mischiefs that have followed in one case, on religion, as it would be to charge those that would follow in the other, on government.

The only way to have prevented such mischiefs as these from arising in the city of God would have been this, that Christians should have adhered closely to the gospel, as it was taught by Christ himself; that they should have thought it, as he thought it, sufficient for them; have received implicitly what is plainly revealed in it, and have avoided all dogmatical decisions on things obscure or doubtful. Explanations in all these cases serve only to multiply disputes, and to establish religion, on human, instead of divine authority. This affords a rule invariable as God himself. The other fluctuates as the opinions, and even the interests of men vary. Under one, Christians might have continued united in the same communion, and even members of the same family, friends and brethren. Under the other it is impossible that this, which is the great object of Christianity, should be obtained; and therefore I am willing to believe, that they who had been the immediate disciples of the Saviour preached his gospel in a spirit of union, in so simple a style, and in so strict and scrupulous a conformity to the revelations he had made, in what form soever the writings of these men have come down to us, through very interpolating hands, that there neither was nor could be any division among them, nor any seeds of division sowed by them. He who compares the epistles of James, of Peter and John, such as we have them, with those of Paul, and all these with the doctrines of the gospel, will be perhaps of this opinion; at least he will have no ground to say of the three first, that they were authors of new gospels, as he will have grounds to say of the last, and as the last does in effect say of himself. He will be of this opinion too the more easily, on account of a very sensible difference in the manner as well as the matter of their writings. There is a most remarkable and amiable anecdote to this purpose mentioned by some writers, and for which the authority of Jerom is cited. St. John had been long confined in the Island of Patmos, to which Domitian had banished him, and where it is pretended that he wrote the Apocalypse, that strange rhapsody of unintelligible revelations, as they are called most absurdly. It is much more probable, and more for the honor of the evangelist, as well as of Christianity, to believe that they were composed by Cerinthus, by a visionary of the same name as that of the

apostle, or by some other enthusiast. They were not admitted into the canon at Laodicea, nor would have been ever admitted to disgrace it, if Justin, Irenæus, Origen, and Tertullian, in whom the love of mystery was a kind of delirium, and after their example several of the other fathers, had not crowded them into the canon by receiving them as canonical. The anecdote I am about to produce will show how far St. John was, though his gospel gave him the title of the theologian, from multiplying and propagating mysteries, and how he retained that character of plainness and simplicity, which he had acquired in the school of his divine master. Domitian dead, and Nerva Emperor, the holy evangelist returned to his church at Ephesus, threescore years after the death of Jesus. Not only the gospels, his own among the rest, which it is said that he wrote at the desire of people as soon as he returned to them; but even the epistles were then written, and the system of Christianity had taken, in most of the churches at least, the form which Paul had given it. If the good old man, feeble and decrepid, was unable to make long sermons, it appeared that he did not think them very necessary neither; for when he spoke in the public assemblies, the sum of what he said was, children love one another. The people of Ephesus, where Paul had been, where he boasted that he had fought with beasts after the manner of men, where he had certainly made long and mystical discourses, were disappointed and dissatisfied with the succinct and plain doctrine of their bishop; but when they expostulated with him upon it, they had a very short and decisive answer, this the Lord commands: and if you do this, it is sufficient. He spoke to men who believed already in Jesus the Messiah, and in all that he had just before recorded in the gospel he published at their request, after his return from Patmos. Whatever others might think, he thought that the gospel wanted no further explanations, nor extensions, and contented himself therefore to recall to their memory, on every occasion, that fundamental article of the law of nature, and the law of the gospel, universal benevolence.

The character of St. John was not that of St. Paul. One had been formed in the bosom of Jesus; called to be a disciple, and commissioned to be an apostle, instructed by the doctrine and example of his master. He had, like Peter and the rest, no other sicience, and what that was the four evangelists tell us. Paul, on the contrary, had been educated in the schools of the law, such as the law was become in those days; when oral tradition, cabalistic mysteries, and scraps of Pythagorician, Platonic, and even Stoician doctrines, had been blended with it, and composed the most extravagant systems of philosophy and religion.

The masters of all this learning were the Pharisees, whose sect began probably two hundred years before Christ, and was in the highest reputation when he came into the world. Of this sect was Paul; and he continued in it till he was about forty years old, profiting in the religion of the Jews above many of his equals—exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers—and persecuting the church of God.* After this, he, who had resisted so many miracles, was converted by a miracle which he and his amanuensis Luke have related. He was called by God himself in a great light, which was always understood to denote some divine presence, to be an apostle, a chosen vessel, replenished with gifts of the Holy Ghost, and overflowing with grace. His peculiar destination was to preach Christ, whom God had revealed to him, among the heathen: and this he began to do immediately, for being made an apostle by a distinct commission from the rest, he conferred not with flesh and blood, nor went up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before him, but preached as soon as his eyes were opened, as he had received the imposition of hands, and as he had been baptised, by virtue of a particular inspiration, that gospel of which he speaks to the Galatians with so much confidence, that he pronounces every one who should preach any thing different from it, himself, an angel from Heaven, and therefore most certainly even the other apostles, accursed. It was not till three years after his journey into Arabia, and his return to Damascus, that he went to Jerusalem, where he communicated privately to them which were of reputation, the gospel he preached to the Gentiles; for he might want their approbation, though he did not want their information nor advice: and this he obtained so far that they gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that these two should preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and they, that is the other apostles, to the children of Israel.

This short deduction of facts, taken from St. Paul's own account of himself, and in which he assured the Galatians before God that he lied not, may serve to introduce an observation touched upon already, and more easily made than explained. In the last chapter of his epistle to the Romans, he calls the gospel he preached, my gospel; which expression he cannot be supposed to have used, says Mr. Locke in his note on the passage, very justly, unless he knew that what he preached had something in it, that distinguished it from what was preached by others. But what that was we are left by this able commentator to seek. It was not plainly, what he says it was plainly, the mystery of God's purpose of taking in the Gentiles to be his

* Epist. to the Gal. Chap. i.

people—and without subjecting them to circumcision, or the law of Moses. If this mystery, so inconsistent with the declarations and practice of Jesus, was revealed to Paul, it was revealed to the apostles too, since they preached and published the glad tidings of salvation indifferently to Jews and Gentiles; in doing which had this mystery been revealed to him exclusively of them, they would have been apostles of Paul in this instance, rather than of Christ. If the exemption of the Gentile converts from circumcision, and other observances of the Mosaical law, was the mystery, the mystery was explained by the decree of the council of Jerusalem; by which nothing more was required of the Gentiles, than to abstain from idolatry, or meats offered to idols, from fornication, and from blood. St. Paul assumed, indeed, that not only the vocation of the Gentiles, but this exemption in favor of them and of the Jews too, were mysteries revealed particularly to him. It is evident, however, that the other apostles and the elders looked on it as no mystery at all, and that they treated it as a matter of discipline: so that a question may arise, whether St. Paul was, what the Pope pretends to be, above the council, or the council above him. The apostles had given no directions to insist, that the Gentiles should, or should not, submit to circumcision, and to the yokes of the law, which St. Peter scruples not to say, in his speech on that occasion, were so heavy, that "neither they nor their fathers were able to bear them."* In a word, by the opinion St. James delivered, and by the whole tenor of the decree, it is manifest, that the mistaken zeal for the law, which some of the Jews retained after their conversion, and perhaps the immoderate zeal of St. Paul for an immediate and total abolition of it, had given rise to this dispute, and that it was determined not as a point on which the divine purpose had been revealed to Paul, or any one else, but according to what has been just now said, as a point of discipline left to the discretion of the apostles and elders, whose sole regard was to prevent any schism in a church hardly yet formed, and who, for that reason, whilst they indulged the Jews in circumcision and other ritual observances of their law, exempted the Gentiles from the far greatest and heaviest part of them.

But there is something more to be observed. If the purpose of God was to take the Gentiles to be his people under the Messiah in this manner, if their abstaining from Jewish rites and ceremonies was a positive law of God under the new covenant, as the abstaining from idolatry was both under the new and under the old, how came it to pass, that the Messiah himself gave no instruction about it to his apostles, when he sent them to

* Acts, chap. xv.

preach his gospel to all nations, and, as we may say, to people his kingdom, which they did chiefly out of the Gentile world? Why was the revelation of this important mystery, so necessary to be published at the very first publication of the gospel, if it was the eternal purpose of God, or else not necessary at all, reserved for St. Paul, who was then a persecutor, not a preacher of the gospel, and whose apostleship did not begin before the conversions? Shall we say that this eternal purpose of the Father was unknown to the Son? We shall blaspheme if we do. Shall we say that it was known to him, but that he neglected to communicate it to the first preachers of his gospel, and gave them imperfect instructions? The profanation will be little less. These questions, and some others of the same kind, will not be easily answered, unless it be by men who are never at a loss to account for the absurdities that they impute to the divine conduct, by supposing it directed according to such partialities as are proportioned to the lowness of their minds: but the pertness, not to say the impudence, of these men deserving no regard, we must seek another solution of the difficulty, and endeavor to find what it was that distinguished St. Paul in this respect from the other apostles, and gave him a reason for calling the gospel he preached his own gospel.

Some solution of this sort may occur to us, perhaps, if we reflect on what was mentioned above concerning the difference between the manner in which St. Paul preached the gospel, and that of the other apostles; which difference marks very strongly the different schools wherein they had been instructed, and had formed the habits that characterised them, the school of Christ and the school of Gamaliel. From one of these the apostles had brought great modesty and gentleness of temper, a short, familiar, and simple style, like that of their Lord and master. From the other St. Paul carried into the apostleship, with a great stock of Jewish learning, a great deal of that assuming air which is apt to accompany much learning, or the opinion of it: and accordingly we find him obliged more than once in his epistles to excuse his boasting, and the value he set on himself, by such humble expressions as a man who had not been full of the Holy Ghost might, in his case, have taken a pride in using. He carried with him likewise, from the Pharisaical schools, a great profusion of words, and of involved unconnected discourse, even on those subjects which required to be the most clearly and distinctly developed, if they were to be insisted upon at all, and not to be passed over in silence rather, or touched very transiently, as they had been by the other apostles. The other apostles were all evangelists, that is, they were publishers of the glad tidings of salvation: they declared to the world that the kingdom of the

Messiah, that is, the spiritual kingdom, was begun, and they taught men the indispensable conditions of belief and practice, in order to be admitted into it. Farther than was necessary to this purpose, they did not affect to carry their doctrines. They meant to convince, not to perplex the minds of men. They knew that by doing the last, they should obstruct the first; or should give great advantage to the false doctors that were arisen, and were to arise to corrupt Christianity. St. Paul was a loose paraphraser, a cabalistical commentator, as much at least as any ancient or modern rabbin; and though his gospel was, in the fundamental principles of it, the same as theirs, yet he mingled it up with so much of his own theology, that he might not improperly, and in our sense, call it his own, and that we may call him the father of artificial theology. Not content to reveal mysterious truths in propositions whose terms were intelligible, though the manner of being of these truths was still a mystery, which is no objection to the belief of any thing contained in a revelation once proved to be divine, he amplified them, descanted upon them, opened the whole economy of divine wisdom from Adam to Christ, and accounted for the several dispensations of God to man. The original gospel, such as the other apostles preached it, was a plain system of belief and practice, fitted for all times, and proportioned to all understandings. St. Paul's gospel, if it may be said to be fitted as much as the others for all times, of which I doubt, cannot be said to be proportioned to all understandings. It is evidently not so to the understandings of the deepest divines, and the most subtile metaphysicians; since they have been wrangling about it from that time to this, and have established the most opposite doctrines on the same texts, to the breach of all charity, and the disturbance of the Christian world.*

* I will mention a little more fully in this note, what I omitted in the text. All that is said there, is said relatively to received interpretations and opinions, such as Mr. Locke would have admitted, and were therefore proper to be followed in reasoning against him. But if I am to speak my own opinion, the matter in question may be decided more shortly, and on the whole more consistently. St. Paul then might very well talk of his gospel, even in contradistinction to that of Christ; since he taught several doctrines which had no foundation in that of Christ, and others, as I have said, that were directly repugnant both to the word and example of the Messiah. Christ professed Judaism and declared himself sent to the Jews alone, and not even to the Samaritans, so positively, that when he commissioned his apostles, he may be, and, to make him consistent, ought to be understood to have meant no more, than to send them to the Jews dispersed in all nations. St. Paul on the contrary, instead of grafting Christianity on Judaism, insisted on an entire abolition of the latter; to which however he had conformed most hypocritically on more occasions than one; and his doctrine became, not at once, but in time, the doctrine of the Christian church. This may appear strange to those

It may be said that some passages in the four gospels, and even some expressions of Christ recorded in them, have been liable to various interpretations, and have produced such disputes and contents as these which I ascribe to the writings of St. Paul. But although this be undoubtedly true, the difference between the original gospel, and that of St. Paul is very real, and very manifest. One is a plain and clear system of religion, with here and there a doubtful phrase that casts no obscurity on the rest. The other is an intricate and dark system, with here and there an intelligible phrase that casts no light on the rest, but is rather lost in the gloom of the whole. By faith I may believe, but by faith I cannot understand. A proposition, the terms of which are unintelligible, is an absolute mystery: to say that we are bound to believe mysteries in this sense is itself nonsense; to say we do believe them is a lie. But a proposition, the terms of which are intelligible, may be an object of faith, though we understand by it nothing more than the terms; when it is supported, as was said above, by divine authority, nay often when it is supported only by human. A man, upon whose knowledge and sincerity I ought to depend, reveals to me a few mathematical truths, which in certain circumstances, it is necessary I should know, and troubles me neither with the demonstrations which I might not be able to comprehend, nor with many corollaries to be drawn from them which I do not want. Another, the scholar of the first, and of less authority than his master, brings me a paper filled with diagrams, and letters and figures, which he assures me contains demonstrations of the former truths, and explanations of several corollaries deducible from them. I understand neither. Those whom I consult appear to understand them as little as myself, by their disputes about the meaning of them. The truths which were clear and sufficient for me in simple propositions, as I received them first, are involved in mystery; and then incoherent, figurative discourse thickens the cloud.

Let any man read the epistles we have of this apostle's writing, after he has read the gospels; let him read the former, as

who read, without a free consideration of what they read: and it will appear still more strange to them to find a Pagan Emperor, and a great enemy both of Jews and Christians, introduced as an instrument appointed by God to accomplish his secret designs in confirming the doctrine of St. Paul's gospel; and yet Adrian is so introduced by Sulpicius Severus; for he says that the Christian church at Jerusalem having had till that time none but Jews in the episcopal chair, and the greatest part of the faithful there believing in Jesus Christ without departing from the legal ceremonies, that edict of Adrian, which hindered Jews from going to Jerusalem, was of great use to Christianity; by which we must understand the Christianity of St. Paul's gospel, and not that of Christ's.

he would read any other books of philosophy or theology; let him call in Mr. Locke to his assistance, who has succeeded better, perhaps, than any other expositor, by happier conjectures, and no greater license of paraphrase, in giving an air of coherence, consistency, and rationality to these epistles, and in making them intelligible: such a man will not be able, after all his pains, to show any one mystery that is left unfolded in the concise language of the gospel taught by Christ and his apostles, that has been rendered less mysterious by the prolixity of St. Paul. St. Paul rather doubles mystery than simplifies it, if I may say so, and adds every where a mystery of words to a mystery of things. That they who have, since his time, and after his example, grafted theology on revelation, extended the doctrines of it, explained and applied the prophecies, types and figures, invented new ones of every sort, and raised a variety of discord and systems on the same simple and uniform plan, should be for the most part very little intelligible, is not wonderful. He, who has clear and distinct ideas in his mind, will write clearly and distinctly: and the author who puzzles an attentive reader is first puzzled himself, how common soever it be, in the science we speak of here particularly, to see those admired the most who are the least understood. That has been the case of these men. They have pretended to instruct others on subjects, on which it was impossible they should have clear and distinct ideas, or indeed any ideas at all. But that St. Paul should write confusedly and unintelligibly, he who was illuminated by the Holy Ghost, that he might enlighten the Gentiles, and he who received all he taught by immediate revelation, must be always a problem not easy to resolve. "He was, it is said, a man of quick thought and warm temper—versed in the writings of the Old Testament, full of the doctrines of the New—so that any one may consider him, when he was writing, as beset with a crowd of thoughts, all striving for utterance."* But are we not to consider him too, when he was writing, as a man under the influence of actual inspiration? And was not divine inspiration sufficient to keep him from falling into those faults, want of order and perspicuity, into which none but the meanest of uninspired writers are apt to fall? Mr. Locke should have thought so, since St. Paul says, that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets:† and he in his paraphrase, that Christians, however filled with the Holy Ghost—are not hurried away by any compulsion. A neglect of eloquence, and the ornaments of speech, became an apostle. But it is hard to discern how a neglect of order and perspicuity should be apos-

* Locke's Preface to his Paraphrase, &c. † 1 Cor. c. iv.

tolical, since the design of such a mission is to intruct and to convince.

SECTION X.

After saying so much of the unintelligibility of Paul's gospel, truth authorises me to add, that where it is intelligible it is often absurd, or profane, or trifling. Is not the doctrine of passive obedience, which he teaches, most intelligibly absurd? Is not that of absolute predestination most intelligibly profane? Is not one of them repugnant to common sense? Is not the other as repugnant to all the ideas of God's moral perfections? Would not either of them be sufficient to shake the credit even of Christ's gospel, if they were contained in it?

But it remains that I give an instance of the most intelligible trifling that we find in this gospel, and this instance will lead us to observe in what manner Christianity was taught and propagated by the first converts to it in their public assemblies, and how easily extensions of it, or engraftments on it might be made. We hear much of the extraordinary gifts of the spirit that were bestowed on these converts, such as prophesying, working miracles, and speaking in unknown tongues, which are enumerated, with several others, by St. Paul in the twelfth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthian proselytes. The last of these gifts belonged more properly to those who were designed to be missionaries of the gospel, that they might be able to convert unbelievers more effectually in their dispersion over different countries. But where churches were established, St. Paul* prefers the use of the language of the place, dislikes the affectation of using any other, and indulges it only when there is an interpreter at hand. The gift of prophecy, by which he intends not only prediction, but singing of psalms and teaching the doctrines of religion in their public assemblies, is that to which he assigns the first place. Now this gift every one might exercise, even the women. They are ordered, indeed, by some passages, to keep silence in the churches,† and if they will know any thing, to ask their husbands at home:‡ and yet it is plain, by other passages of the same epistle, that they were allowed to prophesy, as it is called, and that they did so before the congregations. This apparent contradiction is reconciled by assuming, that though they were not on every ordinary occasion to act the part of teachers and instructors, yet they were not debarred from it, when by any extraordinary motion and impulse of the spirit they were deter-

* 1 Cor. c. iv. † 1 Cor. c. xiv. ‡ Ib. c. xi.

mined to exercise this function. The only dispute was, whether they should exercise it covered or uncovered: and this material point was decided by St. Paul. He let the Corinthians, among whom this dispute had arisen, know, "that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God;" —— from whence he concludes that a man, "who is the image and glory of God —— having his head covered, dishonoreth his head;" but that a woman, "who is the glory of the man, with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head; for that is all one as if she were shaven."* This argumentation may not appear very conclusive, nor indeed very intelligible, to us; but it was both, I doubt not, to the Corinthians, and in all cases it serves to show that both sexes had their revelations, and a right to publish them.

The apostle† proceeds afterwards to give directions for keeping better order in the public assemblies, which were held with great confusion, whilst every one was impatent to show his gifts, and they could not stay to do it one by one. Even these directions left room for some confusion still. Two or three might prophesy at the same meeting, one after another, and the rest of the congregation were to judge; which not only begat debate, but caused interruptions, that usually beget altercation. That this must have happened we may assure ourselves, since by one of the rules St. Paul prescribes, if any thing was revealed to a sitter-by, the speaker was to hold his peace. Simon the magician would have bought the power of bestowing the gifts of the Holy Ghost by the imposition of his hands, as he saw them bestowed by Peter and John; and Simon had embraced Christianity, and had been baptised. In an age, therefore, when a communication of these gifts was esteemed so common and so easily given, it could not but be, that multitudes thought they had some or more of these gifts, and especially that of prophesying, and that as some imagined piously, they had inspirations when they had them not; so others, even this magician, though the apostles had rejected his offer, affected impiously to have them. It could not be hard to pass false revelations on a world, on whom it was so easy to pass false miracles, which this very Simon, and other supposed magicians, and real impostors, did very frequently.

This opinion of divine illuminations and revelations being once established, an abstruse theology being once grafted on the plain doctrines which the gospel taught, and an example being set of extending the system beyond its native simplicity by collecting passages here and there, and by comparing and applying them in a cabalistical manner, even according to the sound very

* 1 Cor. c. xi.. † Ibid. c. xiv.

often, rather than the import of the words, the natural consequences did not fail to follow among the illiterate and superstitious Jews and Gentiles, who were the first converts to Christianity. I need not stay to point out these consequences. History ancient and modern does that sufficiently, and even our own experience in some degree. Every man, who has heard of the language and behaviour of men possessed with fanaticism, may point them out to himself. But enthusiasm, superstition, and the abuse of religion were not confined to the most illiterate. A multitude of new doctors arose, all of whom pretended to have divine knowledge, and some to be divine persons. A multitude of doctors formed a multitude of sects: the followers of Simon the magician, as he was thought by those who were no conjurers themselves, the disciples of Carpocras and of Cerinthus, of Cerdon, Marcion, and soon after these of Manes, the Nicholaites, the Valentinians, and many others; for they grew up apace.

These men had the Old Testament and several gospels and several apostolical epistles before them, for no canon of Scripture was yet settled, nor till more than three centuries afterwards; though it may seem not a little extraordinary that this should have been neglected, whilst the tradition, that could alone establish the authenticity of these writings, was fresh enough to be itself authentic. The writings, however, that passed all for authentic, in some or other of the Christian churches, these men had. Nay some of them had been hearers of the apostles, and had begun to dogmatise at the same time. Neither they nor their successors had the same spirit. But they assumed the same liberty, and by adding allegory to allegory, type to type, mystery to mystery, and one arbitrary interpretation to another, Christianity became a confused chaos of theology. Such it continued long, and such it is, in some degree, even now; for though many of the systems that were formed out of it, and that were coeval with it, wore out in the space of three or four centuries, many others sprung up from the same seeds, and were nursed into maturity and strength by the same culture. Nay some of the same seeds produce now and then, even at this day, and in our own country, a feeble weed or two in the vineyard of the Lord. Some of the churches, which were established by the apostles or their immediate successors, and which maintained a charitable correspondence together, might maintain likewise, for ought we know, with greater purity of manners, a greater purity of doctrine. But we must not believe, on the first head, that they who dissented from them, and were therefore called heretics by them, fell into such abominations as have been represented by Irenæus, Tertullian, Epiphanius, and other fathers, who were very choleric, very foul-mouthed, and often guilty of scandalous exaggera-

tion. A charge that may be brought with the more confidence, since it is supported by their own writings that are extant, and by men of the greatest authority in ecclesiastical literature; and since it can be neither denied, evaded, nor excused by those who are the least willing to own it. As we must not believe all that the fathers advance on this head, so must we not believe on the other, as many good people seem to do, that the primitive Christians had an uniform plan of theology, explained as we explain it, and understood as we understand it. The system swelled insensibly faster among some, more slowly among others: and they seemed to agree much better than they did in reality, as it appeared when criticism came in fashion, and they were obliged to express themselves with more precision concerning the principal articles of their faith.

SECTION XI.

All these sects may be comprehended under the general name of gnostics, or learned and illuminated. At first they affected to have it thought, that they alone were both one and the other, and to despise such as could not discover all they pretended to discover of the hidden sense of the Scriptures, and of the mysteries of Christianity. But the orthodox grew, in time, as much gnostics as others: and we see that Clement of Alexandria* thought it necessary to be so, in order to be truly religious. Illumination, and the gifts of the spirit served to establish this Christianity: but philosophy, and the sciences were of use to confirm and improve it. No ages nor countries could be more prepared to adopt every theological and metaphysical notion, even the most extravagant and least intelligible, than those wherein the Christian religion was first published and propagated. Egypt, and the eastern kingdoms, had been famous schools of a reputed divine philosophy. Pythagoras had gone to them all. Plato had gone to the former only. But what he had not acquired at the first hand, from the gymnosophists, the followers of Zoroaster, the Magi and other oriental masters, he acquired at the second, by conversing with the Italic philosophers, and by a study of their writings. He says somewhere, that the Greeks improved and mended all they borrowed from the barbarians, which I am far from believing to be true. But if Pythagoras and he carried any science farther than their masters, I incline to think it was the most fantastic.

Since the works of Plato are in our hands, we may speak of

* Strom. lib. 7.

him and his theology with more assurance than of those who went before him, or of their doctrines. Those of Orpheus, or those that passed under such a name in ancient Greece, were chiefly mythological; those of Pythagoras symbolical; and those of Plato metaphysical, with a mixture of the other two. Nothing could be more proper, nor effectual, to promote fantastical knowledge, than a method of philosophising by fables, symbols, and almost a perpetual allegory. But the founder of the Academy did more. He poisoned the very source of all real knowledge, by inducing men to believe, that their minds are capable of abstracting, as no human mind can abstract, and of acquiring ideas, that it is impossible any human mind should perceive. He pretended to raise a mystic ladder, on which we might not only clamber up by dint of meditation to a region of pure intellect, wherein alone is knowledge, and leave sensible objects behind us, concerning which nothing better than opinion is to be had, but find at the head of it incorporeal essences, immaterial forms, spiritual beings and perhaps the logos or second god, as the supreme God is supposed to have been at the head of the ladder Jacob saw in his dream. Angels went up and down one: philosophers were to go up and down the other.

This philosopher dealt little in physics: and he was in the right to neglect them. Metaphysics served his purpose better. Hypotheses of the former kind must be founded in some real knowledge, how high soever the top of the ladder reaches, the foot must stand firm on the earth. But hypotheses of the other kind are more easy to be framed, and less easy to be controlled. Thus, for instance, an intellectual world being once assumed, wherein the ideas, the forms, the patterns of all that exist in the sensible world reside, it was easy to people it with numberless intellectual, that is, spiritual, that is, immaterial, that is, simple beings without extensions or solidity, that is, beings of which these refiners had negative, but no positive ideas. They were at liberty afterwards to suppose whatever relations they pleased between these beings, and between them and men. Metaphysical hypotheses, in short, are not content to account for what may be by what is, nor to improve science according to the conditions of our nature, by raising probability on the foundations of certainty; but the makers of them affect to range in the immense void of possibility, with little or no regard to actuality, and begin very often, as well as end, in supposition. Not only their systems are hypothetical, but the first principles of them, and the very ideas and notions, which compose them, are hypothetical too.

Such a philosopher, such a teacher of imaginary and fantastic knowledge, Plato was. Notwithstanding which, or for which

reason rather, he grew soon into great vogue in Greece, and in those countries, where Grecian literature was propagated after the expedition of Alexander. This philosophy could not fail to be well received in those countries, from the schools of which it had been derived originally; and it flourished accordingly. and triumphed, as it were, over all others in some parts of Asia, and in Egypt, whilst it made its way into Italy and was propagated westward through the Roman Empire. The Jews of Palestine, and they who lived under the protection of the Ptolemies, had taken a strong tincture of heathen philosophy, and of this in particular. The doctrines of the immortality of the soul, of a future state of rewards and punishments, and even that of a metempsychosis, were adopted by the learned amongst them; though they were rejected by those who adhered to the letter of the law; for Moses had taught nothing of this kind. If any such hints are contained in other books of their Scriptures, it is impossible to say when, or by whom those books were written, with the least assurance, notwithstanding all the dogmatical impertinence of scholars: whereas we know, that all their sacred writings were compiled after their captivity, and that the canon of them was long in settling. It is possible, therefore, and even evident, that if they knew anything of these doctrines, which had not been transmitted to them by Moses, before their acquaintance with the Greek philosophy, they must have learned it from the nations among whom they had been mixed, and from whom the Greeks had learned the same, from the Chaldeans, and even from the Egyptians, with whom they had commerce, and in whose country many of them found a refuge in the desolation of their own by the Babylonians. But if they had so learned it, they had learned it very darkly; for there is no instance that shows they understood, received, or taught these doctrines, till long after their first acquaintance with the Greeks.

But be this as it will, it is certain, that Platonism was an established philosophy among the Jews before the coming of Christ, and that it was much more so among the Christians afterwards. It is astonishing to consider how fond the Christians were, in the first ages of this church, to believe, and to make others believe, that all the mysteries of their religion had been revealed by the writings of Pagan philosophers, many centuries before they were so by the preaching of Christ and his apostles; as if the latter could want, or the former give any additional authority. It was to promote this opinion, that so many books were forged under the names of Mercurius Trismegistus, of Hystaspes, of the Sybils, and perhaps of others. These forgeries, indeed, were so gross, that they might be well suspected even at the time they were published. Their credit, however, was

maintained, till they had had in some degree the effect they were designed to have. When they could have this effect in any degree no longer, they were rejected, and even condemned. There was the less need of them for the absurd purposes to which they were applied, because the writings of Plato,* writings indisputably his, were public; and because his works alone, wherein was mingled much of the Pythagorean and other ancient theology, formed an ample and sufficient repertory of theological fables and symbols, and of metaphysical mysteries. They who have employed themselves from those days to ours in raising systems of divinity on the gospel, and imposing their own inventions by pretending the authority of it, have contented themselves accordingly with the assistance of Plato and Aristotle; of the master for sublimity of matter; of the scholar for subtility of form.

If the absurdity of those, who have gone about to explain, to confirm, and even to improve Christianity by the doctrines and authority of paganism, be, as it is surely, very astonishing; we must confess, that it is still more astonishing to observe the strange conformity between Platonism and genuine Christianity itself, such as it is taught in the original gospel. We need not stand to compare them here. Particular instances of conformity will occur often enough. In general, the Platonic and Christian systems have a very near resemblance, "qualis decet esse sororum:" and several of the fathers, as well as modern divines, have endeavored with all their might, by forced constructions, and sometimes by no very faithful extracts, to make this resemblance appear still greater. Ridiculous endeavors, no doubt, since they give unbelievers occasion to say, that if the doctrines are the same, they must have been deduced from the same principle, and to ask what that principle was, whether reason or revelation? If we say it was reason; they will reply, that reason could not discover what reason cannot comprehend when it is discovered. A mystery may be an object of faith to him, to whom it is communicated in an intelligible proposition. But it must be an object of knowledge in him who communicates it, and requires an assent to it, on his own authority, that is, on a confidence that he knows it to be true, and that it is no mystery to him. If we say it was revelation; they will reply, that Plato then must have been illuminated by the Holy Ghost; that he must have been the precursor of the Savior, as some Platonic bigots have ventured, with a very little softening to the term, to call him; and that he must have been a precursor too of more importance than St. John. St. John instituted a baptism of repentance; and much

* "Res enim et verba scholam Platonis sapiunt, iis exceptis, quæ miscet è libris divinis."—Casaub. speaking of one of these books, in his exercit.

has been said by ancient and modern doctors in theology to state the difference between this baptism and that of Christ, baptism with water,* and baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire.† These terms, as dark as they are, show however a manifest difference; and there can be no doubt that the baptism of Jesus was much more effectual than the baptism of John, as that of John was effectual to higher purposes than that of the Jews. But Plato, instead of calling on men in general to repent, and of instituting one mystical ceremony, anticipated the gospel on so many principal articles of belief and practice, that, as some divines say the gospel was a republication of the law of nature, the unbelievers will say it was a republication of the theology of Plato. They will argue *à fortiori*, that since the republication of these mysteries was made by divine revelation, the publication of them must have been of necessity made by the same means, and they will conclude perhaps, by asking with a sneer, whether a man, whose passion for courtesans, and handsome boys, inspired him to write so many lewd verses, was likely to be inspired by the Holy Ghost?

Such considerations as these are more than sufficient to explode the impertinent and profane notion, that Plato was inspired immediately, or that he had, in any lower degree metaphysicians can imagine, such a share of divine illumination as enabled him to discover, in part at least, those mysterious truths that were not to be fully revealed till the Messiah came. But the question returns, how came he to discover them, even in part, near four centuries before the Messiah did come? or how came they to make a part of that pagan theology from which he took them? A plain answer may be made to these questions: and I think there is no other that can be reconciled to common sense. I have hinted at it already: but it requires to be more explained. All we can know of the divine nature, of the attributes, providence, and will of God, must be communicated to us by his word, or collected by us from his works. The heathen philosophers had not his word, and they corrupted all the knowledge they acquired from his works by their manner of philosophising. They not only hastened too rashly from particular to general knowledge, and from a few imperfect observations of the phenomena, to the most extensive hypotheses, but they raised hypotheses independently of the observations they made, or might have made, and then reasoned on these hypotheses as from certain principles of knowledge: so that the little real knowledge they acquired *à posteriori* was controlled by that which they fancied that they acquired *à priori*, and thus the whole mass

* In aquâ in pœnitentiam. † In spiritu sancto, et igni. Mat. cap. iii.

of the first philosophy was corrupted. They discovered, in his works, a first intelligent cause of all things, a Being of infinite power and wisdom, whose providence is over all his creatures, and whose will, relatively to man, is manifested in the whole human system. Here was abundant matter of real knowledge. Thus far the Supreme Being lets himself down, if I may use such an expression, within the verge of human comprehension, and of human alone, as far as we can judge of the animal world about us. Beyond this fixed point we can have no real ideas, and therefore no real knowledge. All that we may imagine we have, is, and must be, fantastical. We are no more able to acquire knowledge beyond, than other animals up to this point: and the divine nature, the manner of being, the moral attributes of God, the general system of his providence, are as inscrutable to man as to them. His will too, according to which they are determined by natural instinct, is as inscrutable to us, as to them, beyond the bounds of natural revelation, unless a supernatural revelation communicate farther knowledge, which it did not to these philosophers.

What now was their proceeding? Did they stop where the means of knowledge stop? Not at all. Where the system ended the hypothesis began; and with this difference between these and all other hypotheses, that those which are made in physics are made on subjects on which we have much knowledge, and means in our power of acquiring more; whereas hypotheses in theology are made on a subject we know little of, and have not the means of knowing more. Error in the former may be corrected by improvement of knowledge: error in the latter cannot, because there can be no improvement beyond the point where such hypotheses begin. It has been observed in these essays, and more than once, perhaps, that there are philosophers who boast much of the power which the human mind has of ranging far and wide in the regions of possibility, and of perceiving what may be, as well as what is, from whence they draw very foolish conclusions in favor of human understanding. Now that the mind of man has such a power, we know most consciously. But we know, or may know too as consciously, that the exercise of this power is dangerous, and that he who does not use it under a strict control of judgment on imagination will be sure to render his conduct and his science both fantastical. Plato, like all the divines of Paganism, was far from preserving such a control. No man had more imagination; no man controlled it less.

It would be easy to conceive, if we had not his works before us, that such extravagant methods of philosophising must have produced the most extravagant opinions; and he who reads these works, like a man in his senses, will be tempted to think, on many

occasions, that the author was not so. I say on many occasions; for on some it is certain, that he writes like a very pious and rational theist and moralist. But on the whole, his writings are pieces of patch-work, and there are few of them that do not abound in false sublime and low images, in things above comprehension, in things below notice, in the brightest truths, and the foulest errors; and, to come to the present purpose, some of them abound in notions that are agreeable to the Christian system, and in others that are repugnant to it; or that bearing an appearance of likeness, nay of sameness, are much more proper to promote superstition and enthusiasm, as in fact they did, than true religion. These considerations, every one of which may be justified by the most famous of his dialogues, gave occasion perhaps, to some difference that arose in the reception of Platonism by the Christian Fathers. St. Chrysostom, it is said, declaimed against it; and I remember a passage in Tertullian,* wherein he complains that the seeds of heresies were scattered in Plato's books of the Republic, and in his doctrine of ideas, which he calls "hæretica idearum sacramenta."† The greatest Fathers of the church, however, though they differed in other things, agreed in admiring Plato, and borrowed much of their theology from him. Such were Justin, Origen, Jerome, Austin, to quote no others, and the first the most remarkably. But how venerable soever their names may be, their conduct was in this respect extremely absurd, injurious to the gospel, and derogatory to the authority of it, as will appear undeniably by the reflections I had in view when I said, that a plain answer might be made to those who should ask how the mysterious truths of the gospel could be known, without divine illumination, to Plato.

SECTION XII.

The reflections, I meant, are these. What the Christians borrowed from Plato's works was not contained in the gospel, or it was contained in it. If no such thing was contained in it, the presumption of those was inexcusable, who added a single doctrine to the Christian system, or even an explanation of a doctrine, on the faith of a heathen philosopher, whose theism, though purer than that of others, had still a tang of superstition, and even of polytheism. With respect to God, this presumption was a profanation: with respect to man it was a fraud. The Christians who were guilty of it imposed on themselves, or if

* De Anima.

† —— In ideis Platonicis gnosticorum hæretica semina relucere.

not on themselves, on others as far as their authority extended, the word of Plato for the word of God. If the things they borrowed were contained in the gospel, they had no reason whatever for borrowing; or this must have been their reason, they must have thought the authority of Plato necessary to confirm that of Christ, or reason necessary to render complete what revelation taught imperfectly. The first is a blasphemous, and the second a silly thought. Reason is necessary and sufficient to establish revelation, as it has been shown above. But when the truth of a revelation is established, we are to believe implicitly; the use of reason ceases, her interposition grows impertinent, and nothing can be more so than the affectation of ancient and modern divines, to banish her out of her province, or to appeal to her very weakly in it; whilst they introduce her into another, and would be thought to rest upon her, where she has nothing to do. Whenever they do this, they go out of their strength: and reason, improperly used, becomes a much better weapon of offence, in the hands of their enemies, than of defence, in theirs; as the writings of many eminent divines may demonstrate.

If reason now be so ill employed about mysteries that are proposed, she is still less fit, and less likely, to propose them. Montagne would say, they are not her game. The object of reason is truth, intelligible, attainable truth: and if she goes at any time in pursuit of it into that well where it lies concealed, as Empedocles, Democritus, and the rest of the ancient philosophers complained so loudly, she never plunges so far into the dark as to be unable to distinguish it from error. Divine mysteries she receives implicitly, but she advances none of her own under that title: and a reasonable man, and a mystic man, seem two distinct species. All mysteries, that are not communicated expressly by revelation, are produced by metaphysical delirium and religious enthusiasm; to both of which men of the brightest genius have been often transported. Seneca declares a man, who does not rise above humanity contemptible.* Many have thought they did so, and, sober on all other subjects, have been stark mad on these; for there is a madness *quoad hoc*, if I may say so: and neither you nor I could be at a loss to cite several, and some living examples of it. But there is too a degree of affectation sometimes in this apparent madness, employed for different purposes. The metaphysical delirium may be kept up by a reputation, which singularity alone is often sufficient to acquire, and much more by an opinion of making new discoveries in the intellectual world. This affectation, sus-

* O quàm contempta res est homo, nisi supra humana se erexerit!

tained by his own warm imagination, and by those of his Egyptian and Pythagorean masters, possessed Plato very strongly, and answered very effectually his purpose in the acquisition of fame. He knew the people with whom he had to do; he knew that no mythology was too gross, no pretended abstractions too whimsical for them: and nothing can show so much either how he had turned their heads, or how easily heads were turned by the marvellous in those days, as the general opinion that prevailed of his divine birth. Apollo appeared to Aristo his father, and forbid him to enjoy his wife during the space of ten months; which was a very unnecessary precaution, if the poor man had often tried and never could; and if Perictione was a virgin, when the same god appeared to her in a vision, and she conceived. Thus Plato was begot to be a physician of souls, as Æsculapius had been to be a physician of bodies.

Plato might safely give a loose to all the extravagance of his imagination in such an age, and be assured that the wildest hypotheses would pass for systems of sublime knowledge, and that the doctrines the least understood would be the most admired. He improved this advantage to the utmost, and it happened, as it might, without inspiration or miracle, that in his rambling speculations about the divine and spiritual nature, about the immortality of the soul, about God's dispensations in this life and another, and various matters relative to these, he blundered on some divine truths that were not quite beyond human apprehension, according to human ideas; though they had not been yet revealed to mankind, nor stripped of types and figures, those sacred hieroglyphics, wherein they lay involved. This answer to the question, above mentioned, is plain and full; for if events, that were to come to pass in the order of providence, were foretold sometimes by men who neither knew any thing of this order; nor even that they prophesied when they did prophesy, as divines have sometimes said, why should not some truths, that were to be manifested in after ages by divine revelation, be anticipated by human imagination? Human reason would have never discovered them, because they are no more objects of of intuitive, nor of demonstrative, than they are of sensitive knowledge; but imagination conceiving them possible, might impose them for true on minds wherein she exercised the plenitude of her power. Christians, therefore, might have given this answer, and have evaded by it the absurdity of supposing Plato inspired, and the difficulty of accounting for the Christianity of his doctrines without this supposition.

SECTION XIII.

I have insisted, and must insist again a little largely, on the theology of Plato; though I have said a great deal in a former essay concerning his philosophy in general, in order to show the more fully and clearly on what original authority we rest in matters of religion, and because his works have been made, after the writings of St. Paul, a principal foundation of all that theology which has occasioned so many disputes in the world, and has rendered the Christian religion obnoxious to the cavils of infidels: one of which I undertake to refute by showing that it is not religion, but theology, which has done all the mischief complained of so loudly and so justly. Genuine Christianity was taught by God. Theological Christianity is a religion that men have invented, and that has defeated the design by pretending the authority of the former. Human passions, human interests, human fallibility, not those of particular doctors alone, but those of the church œcumenically assembled, from the Nicean council down to that of Trent, have had their share in composing the present intricate, inconsistent, and voluminous system. I can easily believe, that some of these divines meant to preserve the purity of it, and to promote revealed religion. I can believe too, that such philosophers as Socrates and Plato, who contributed to destroy, whilst they pretended rather to reform polytheism and idolatry, meant to restore the purity of theism, and to promote natural religion. But here a difference between them, which is very well founded, and worthy of observation, begins to arise. The latter could support their doctrines by no authority except their own. The former had always the pretence of spiritual gifts to authorise them.

Faith in Christ, the Messiah, is the first principle of Christianity, an article as plain as it is essential. But there are other articles in the gospel, darkly revealed, because doubtfully expressed; besides several in the other parts of the New Testament the sense of which never has been fixed. Christian divines have supposed all these alike essential. They have supposed that, as obedience is better than sacrifice, faith is as essential or more essential than works: and every sect has supposed the understanding and believing these ambiguous passages, in the sense in which their teachers expound them, necessary to the salvation promised in the gospel. Thus it happened formerly, and thus it happens still, that the objects of faith vary in every Christian sect: and as neutrality, in the civil contests of the Athenian commonwealth, was branded with a note of infamy; so in these reli-

gious contests, as they are falsely called, he who takes no side is stigmatised for an infidel by all, and he who takes any side is given over for a heretic to the hangman here, and to the devil hereafter, by every side except his own. In short, it is not enough to believe like a Christian, it is made necessary that men, women, and children should decide like metaphysicians, or believe without knowing what they believe.

If we may be allowed to think, and they who prefer the example and doctrine of Christ to those of Paul will find reason to think, that the Messiah intended rather to reform, and to graft upon Judaism, than to abolish it; we may think too that Socrates and Plato intended rather to reform paganism, and to graft something less carnal, and more spiritual upon it, than by a more direct opposition to the rooted prejudices of their age and country to abolish them quite. This pious attempt cost the master his life, and made the scholar, perhaps, not only involve his doctrines in greater obscurity, but seem, at least in several instances, favorable to the absurdities of paganism. Socrates was a zealous missionary of morality: and the obligations of natural religion in public and private life were taught and pressed upon men both by him and Plato, not only from motives that reason suggests, but by inculcating the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, a doctrine the most usefully believed, and the most weakly proved, says Charron;* and of a future state of rewards and punishments, which they had learned from the Egyptians, among whom these doctrines had prevailed from an unknown antiquity, and not from the Jews who could not derive these doctrines from Moses, and who do not appear to have entertained them till they began to tag their law with the scraps of philosophy.

Adoration of the Supreme Being, gratitude and resignation to the order of his Providence, were the great internal duties of religion, that these philosophers taught: and it is easy to discern what they thought of external worship, by several passages in Plato. In his book of laws he directs indeed, that men should resort to the public temples, deliver their victims and offerings to the priests, and sacrifice and pray there only. But even in that place, where he seems to have so much regard to the uniformity of public worship, he hints sufficiently in what esteem he held it, by his invective against the superstition of private devotions; which, after all he says against them, were founded on the same principles, and performed on the same model, as those of established and public worship. He speaks most reasonably, in the second Alcibiades, of the regard God

* De la Sagesse, l. i, c. 15.

has to a pious disposition of mind, and humorously enough of this external worship, as of an account that men pretend to keep with God, as with a banker or usurer; whereby acts of devotion performed, and benefits received, may be balanced. But the passage, I choose to cite, precedes these in the same dialogue. After showing that men asked things contrary, and hurtful to them, Socrates commends the prayers of the poet who asked Jupiter to grant his friends such things as were good for them, whether they prayed that they might have them or not, and to refuse such as were hurtful, even when they desired them. From hence he takes occasion to commend likewise the custom of the Lacedæmonians, who asked for good in general, and for nothing in particular, "pulchra cum bonis," in all their prayers public and private. They were not, however he says, less happy than other people; and upon that occasion he tells Alcibiades, a story, which he had heard from certain old men. The Athenians, being always beaten at land and at sea by the Lacedæmonians, consulted Jupiter Hammon to know why the gods were more favorable to their enemies, who did not worship them with the same pomp and expense, as the Athenians did? Hammon answered, that the acclamations, that is the prayers of the Lacedæmonians pleased him better than all the reilgious rites and ceremonies of the other Greeks.

Not only the notions of these philosophers concerning divine worship, but their notions concerning the first principle of all religion, the existence of a Supreme Being, were much more conformable to right reason than any of those which prevailed at that time. There are many such scattered about in the writings of Plato, which the most orthodox theist might adopt. He acknowledged one Supreme Being, eternal, ineffable, incomprehensible, all-perfect, the self-existent fountain of all existence, divine and human, himself above all essence. God is truth, but above all truth, intelligent as well as intelligible, but above all intelligence; good, but above all goodness. He is none of these, but the principle of them all, as the sun is the principle of light, and as he makes all things to be seen without being light or sight himself. In a word Plato acknowledged the omniscience, the omnipresence, the infinite power and wisdom of God. These are very elevated sentiments, which may be collected from his writings. They are strained as high as the utmost pitch to which we can carry our ideas, and they point still higher. So they should; for after all the efforts that the mind of man is capable of making, our conceptions will fall infinitely short of their object, when this object is the majesty of the all-perfect Being. Neither Plato, nor they who received his philosophy four or five hundred years after his time, and who were even

more extravagant and less intelligible than he, could push their general and abstract notions of this sort too far. The intellectual prospect is immense, and the intellectual sight must be strained, from objects clearly and distinctly perceived, to such as are less so, and from these, still farther, till it can be strained no more, and the mind is lost in the sublimity of its own conceptions.

If these speculations cannot discover, by infinite degrees, the whole truth, they cannot lead us into any error, and they serve to maintain in our minds that awful sense, and that profound veneration of the Supreme Being, of the true God in the unity of his nature, which are due to him from every intelligent creature. Thus far, therefore, and in this manner, Plato was an excellent master of natural theology. His errors, and those of all other pretenders to metaphysical theology, are owing to speculations of another kind, relative indeed to these, but pursued in a different spirit, the spirit of vain curiosity, and are hypothetical from the first for want of real ideas whereon to set out. In a word, they are engraftments on the religion of nature and of reason, which neither nature nor reason can admit. Our world seems to be, in many respects, the bedlam of every other system of intelligent creatures, and with this unlucky circumstance, that they who are most mad govern, in things of the greatest importance, those who are least so: and Charron* might very well say, that minds thought capable of prophecy, illumination, revelation, and admission into the secret councils of the gods, were such as extasy and enthusiasm transported, or sleep set on dreaming. The observation may be carried down from ancient to modern days, and may be verified by examples of Christian as well as heathen fanatics. There are indeed madmen little less ridiculous among those who pretend to be metaphysicians and theologians, great masters of reason, lovers of wisdom, instructors of mankind, and spiritual guides. It has been the pride and folly of these men in all ages to impose complete systems of knowledge on the world; whereas all human knowledge in its utmost extent is deficient, and a system of this kind, that affects to be, and that appears to be complete, is therefore false. This folly prevailed most in the nonage of philosophy; for as men have risen in science, they have seen their ignorance better. It continues however still, in some degree, and appears, on some occasions, but is so predominant on none as on subjects that the first philosophy furnishes, on which every dabbler in theology, nay, every old woman, "quædam anicula Christiana," to speak like Tertullian, is ready to explain very particularly the

* Lib. i, cap. 6.

divine nature and attributes, the constitution of the spiritual, and the creation and government of the corporeal world, and to speak like another great doctor as well as heretic, the whole scheme, order and state of things.*

Plato gave encouragement, and furnished matter, to this presumption, by his engraftments on natural religion, by the extravagant notions which he propagated, and by his whole manner of philosophising. His works have stood in the place of his imaginary system of eternal ideas, and divines and metaphysicians, who have thought like Malebranche, that they consulted the Logos, and that they derived their knowledge from those abstract beings that reside in the divine intelligence, have consulted only Plato, and have derived from his writings all the whimsies that compose their fantastical science. They may have thought themselves wrapped into a third heaven, as St. Paul says that he, or somebody that he knew, was, or that they rose in extasy, like Plotinus and Porphyry, up to a divine union; but we may assure ourselves, that they never were wrapped in any heaven but that of their own imagination, nor rose to any divine union but that with the divine Plato. To collect all the absurdities and manifest inconsistencies and contradictions, that are to be found in his works, would be to write a treatise larger and as strong at least to the purpose as that of Plutarch on the repugnancies of the Stoics. To separate, from what is reasonable and true in this philosophy, all the logical puerilities, all the false sublime, all the tedious and flimsy argumentations that prove nothing, in a word, all that is unintelligible, or that informs us not when it is understood, would be a work something like to that which our Verulam† wished to see performed in one view, and Montaigne‡ in another; and if I mistake not, the vogue of Plato, the particular importance of some subjects, and the general hurt he has done to science by laying false foundations of it considered, this work would be more useful in a third view: it would show us to what miserable shifts the greatest men are reduced, since Plato is to be numbered among these, when they pretend to give complete systems of knowledge divine and human under the name of philosophy;§ when they assume unattainable knowledge to be attained, and that which is fantastical to be real. But this is a work we shall never see performed. Men, as dull or as mad as all the commentators and translators of Plato have been, are incapable of it, and men who are neither will find themselves more agreeable employment.

* Clarke in his Eviden.
† Advancem. of Lear. lib. 3.
‡ Essays, chap. 12.
§ Philosophia est divinarum et humanarum rerum scientia.

Though this philosopher was not a friend to the polytheism and idolatry of the heathen world, he was not an enemy to superstition. Far from going about to destroy it, he refined, he spiritualised it, and intrenched it more in mystery. He made it more plausible, and more secure from the attacks to which it stood exposed before. He made use indeed, on some occasions, for ornament or illustration, of fables taken from the current mythology, like that of love begot by Porus on Penia, when he was drunk in Jupiter's orchard, and the gods were met to celebrate the birth of Venus: but the divine mythology he taught purposely was not so gross. The gods of the heathen had been men. The sepulchres of these immortals were shown, and they retained in heaven the passions, the manners, and the habits of the earth. The celestial kingdom was peopled, like other countries, by colonies from abroad, by naturalisations of foreigners, and by the generations of those who had been there so long, that they seemed the aborigines of the country. The gods of Plato were of another sort. They were generated indeed, for he supposed too a production and propagation of divinities; but the image of this generation was changed, and gods were said to be produced by emanation or procession; emanations from the first divine essence, like beams from the sun, processions, or rather extensions of the supreme and simple substance,* for thus they have been explained by the Platonics. In some such incomprehensible, if not ineffable manner, (for what is ineffable to one of these philosophers?) souls, angels, and demons were produced; by the supposed existence of the two last of which, visions and dreams, and every art of divination, and every superstition of magic, was upheld.

This little that I have said, may stand as a general specimen of the Platonic theology in this place; for in another, I shall give some that will be more particular. No man ever dreamed so wildly as this author wrote ——— "velut ægri somnia, vanæ finguntur species." But as he had no divine mission nor authority to claim, all this rested on his own authority: he was to prove it as he could, and every man was at liberty to receive or reject all or any of these doctrines as he found the proof. Thus they remained purely hypothetical, nor could be made dogmatical, till Christian divines made them so, by adopting them as parts of divine revelation. Then, indeed, they became dogmas to Christians: and before that time, they were not such to many of the heathens. They could not be such to Plato himself, whatever they were to some of his disciples. He, who published them, knew that he invented them, or that he borrowed them

* Profusio quædam et extensio summæ et simplicis substantiæ.

from those that did invent them, and that neither he nor they were led to them by any chain of knowledge. Neither he nor they could be the bubbles of these doctrines; though they, who received them for true theology, were so. It is not he who makes, but he who swallows, the wine that gets drunk. But as soon as Christians found some, and thought they found others of these doctrines in the gospel, the difference I mentioned between the authority of these divines, and that of the divines of paganism was complete. The authority of revelation confirming that of Plato, propositions that were dubious to the one became certain to the others, and philosophical conjectures became articles of faith: just as it happened afterwards, when the authority of Aristotle was added to both, and new doctrines were devised, by metaphysical explanations and extensions, under pretence of defending the former.

Nothing less than this could have established and continued the theology of Plato. In his days, and long after them, philosophy was for the most part very hypothetical. Physics were so. What wonder if metaphysics were more, nay wholly so? When Plato had brought these, and Aristotle logic, into repute, one of them made the material world metaphysically, the other logically, and both very absurdly. But when they set themselves, and Plato especially, to raise an immaterial intellectual world, metaphysical and logical architecture were most properly employed. They could employ no other: they knew little, imagined much, built beyond nature; and terms and phrases, which supported their schemes, covered equally the deficiency and the futility of their matter, not unlike to those columns and entablatures of painted pasteboard, that imitate the solidity of marble and deceive the eye. This was the least laborious, the shortest and surest way to fame: and whilst men neglected the analysis of ideas, and attended to the forms of argumentation, it was no hard matter to throw words into such forms as were sufficient to keep up dispute in the defence of any doctrines. An hypothesis, plausible to the reason, or to the prejudices, or to the predominat affections and passions of men, formed a sect; and as soon as a sect was formed, the hypothesis became a demonstrated system, which the honor of the sect was concerned to maintain. There were many such among the Greeks, and they were all defended and attacked with equal obstinacy, till time and contests wore them out. If Platonism was not better founded in reason and knowledge than others, it was kept up long with greater art, and had greater good fortune afterwards. Plato gave occasion to both. To the first directly, and by choice. To the last indirectly, and by chance. His immediate successors, Speusippus, Xenocrates, Polemo, Crates, Crantor, had acquired no great fame, nor

had any great success. The Portic and the gardens of Epicurus rivalled the Academy, in opposing dogma to dogma. Arcesilaus, therefore, and Carneades changed the conduct of this philosophical war. By affirming nothing, they left their adversaries nothing to attack; and by assuming, in consequence, the right of disputing against every thing, they were at liberty to take their advantage wherever they found it. The example of their founder, and of his master, suggested this expedient to them, and countenanced them in the use of it. They became terrible to the Stoicians, and to the Epicureans, and to all the Dogmatists.

As these men pretended to revive the first Academy by reverting to scepticism, though they were called authors of a second and a third, and therefore Academic philosophers, so there were others who, under pretence of adhering to the first Academy, professed themselves Dogmatists, and affected to be named Platonicians. Some of these men indeed became Peripatetics, or slided from Platonism into Stoicism, like the philosopher Antiochus, whom Tully mentions;* whilst the suspension of assent was still maintained, as the true principle of the Academy old and new, by Clitomachus, Philo, and Tully. Varro says, in the Academics, there was no difference between the Peripatetics, certain Dogmatists no doubt, and the old Academy.† Tully says, that the Academy they called the new, appeared to him to be the same as the old.‡ Thus the matter stood in Greece and at Rome. But the Platonism that prevailed in Asia and Egypt, and was taught in the famous school of Alexandria, was unquestionably dogmatical in every point. If the philosophers in those countries did not find it, they made it such. It could not otherwise have suited the characters, nor have answered the purposes of Jews, of Christians, and of those who opposed Christianity: by all of whom it was, in some degree, and in a different manner, adopted, according to the method of the eclectic sect that Potamo of Alexandria founded. The object of this sect was very specious. These philosophers were to select the best and truest placits from all others. But we may conclude that they selected, conformably to the human character, such as agreed best with their own opinions, according to the account Diogenes Laertius§ gives of Potamo, that he chose those things that pleased him most. Thus the Jews took some dogmas, the Christians more, and the Pagans most of all, from Plato's philosophy; which became accidentally of greater extent, duration, and importance than the author had any reason to expect.

* In Academ.
† Nihil enim inter Peripateticos, et illam veterem Academiam, differebat.
‡ Hanc Academiam novam appellabant, quæ mihi vetus videtur.
§ In præfat.

There are many things unintelligible in the ancient philosophers, many inconsistent and contradictory, even among those who wrote with the greatest clearness and precision; for I except neither Cicero nor Seneca. It would be time well saved to neglect the first, and nothing can be more ridiculous than the pains that learned men take to disguise or reconcile the others, instead of owning them to be, what after all their pains they are forced to leave them, inconsistencies and contradictions. But Plato has this peculiar advantage over all the philosophers of any name. He has puzzled mankind, not only by particular passages in his writings, but about his own general character as an author. The Dogmatists, and the Sceptics, for such in truth the Academicians were, have claimed him: and it is at this hour a problematical point at least, whether this great philosopher and divine gave a full assent to the truth of his own doctrines. To all of them, to some of the principal, he could not. They were the fruits of his own and of other men's invention; and he must have been conscious that they were so, as I observed above.

SECTION XIV.

It is in itself of little moment in what spirit, and on what motive, Plato wrote, who or what he was. The weight of reason, and not the authority of an author, should decide our opinions:* and this philosopher himself speaks very strongly to this purpose, in many places, in the Gorgias particularly. If a doctrine, which Plato taught, be supported by reason or revelation, we ought to receive it with that assent which is due to truth;† though he were a Sceptic under the mask of a Dogmatist. If any of his doctrines are supported neither by reason nor revelation, we ought to reject them; though he were a Dogmatist under the mask of a Sceptic. This is evident: and yet Christian divines have been in all ages as zealous to make him pass for a Dogmatist, as if nothing more was necessary to establish the truth of a doctrine than to be assured that he thought it true, and taught it as such. In the mean time, they did not enough consider that they made a fool or a knave of their favorite philosopher. Wrong methods of inquiring after truth and knowledge, and frequent contentions about them, ended in a dispute at last, not whether there was any such thing as truth, but whether there was any such thing as know-

* Non tam auctores——quàm rationis momenta quærenda sunt.—Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

†——Alii alios se convincere arbitrantur, cum——multos et celebres testes produxerint——verum hæc probationis ratio nullius est momenti ad veritatem, &c.

ledge. From hence arose Dogmatists, Acataleptics, and Sceptics.* If Plato was one of the former, who boasted that he had found the truth, and if there can be on every subject one opinion alone true, how came he to have different opinions on the same subject, not transiently nor inadvertently mentioned, but formally delivered and maintained? In the other two characters, if he believed all things to be absolutely incomprehensible, or if he restrained his assent because, though he did not deny that truth might be found, he did not determine neither that it had been found; in these two characters, I say, he might very fairly, though not very usefully, deliver contrary opinions, and defend or oppose any of them hypothetically. But neither the supposition of two doctrines, nor of two senses, nor of two characters, in Plato, that stale artifice by which critics make authors say or not say whatever they please, will excuse him as a dogmatist, if he was one, and a dogmatist too who treated the most important points of knowledge, since the being of a God, the worship of him, the first principles of things, and the conduct of Providence, were some of the objects of it.

My way of thinking, which I have found nowhere the least reason to alter, would hinder me from any farther consideration of Plato in this respect, if it was not worth our while to consider how feebly the authorities we value the most are often founded. The fathers of the Christian church have maintained that Plato was a dogmatist, and well they might; since Numenius, a Pythagorean philosopher, asserted the same of Pyrrho, and since Sextus Empiricus says,† that Arcesilaus was suspected to be another. With the paradox concerning Pyrrho I have nothing to do; but surely it is as little possible to imagine what grounds Sextus, who lived four hundred years after Arcesilaus, or St. Austin, who lived above a century later, or indeed any man of his own age, country or school, could have to make a dogmatist of one who disclaimed all knowledge like him, even that which Socrates excepted, the knowledge of his ignorance, as it is to imagine what Numenius meant when he imputed dogmatism to Pyrrho. A man who made it the business of his life, and the principle of his profession, to dispute against every proposition that could be advanced, was not surely a sceptic in appearance alone, "primâ fronte," as Sextus says, but inwardly and in very good earnest. Notwithstanding this, St. Austin ‡ took the fact

* Ex philosophis alii se verum adinvenisse jactant. et dogmatici appellantur. Alii pronunciant, verum nec inveniri nec percipi posse, et cataleptici dicuntur.——Alii, assensum sustinentes, neque statuunt verum inventum esse, neque inveniri posse negant, et dicuntur sceptici, consideratores, et ephectici, cohibitores assensùs.

† Lib. i, cap. 31.

‡ Ep. ad Diosc. ep. 118. ed. Bened.

for granted, and wrought up in his warm imagination a very subtile and pious scheme of policy, which is almost too fanciful for the saint, and which no man, less visionary than he, can believe that the philosopher ever entertained. Some such there have been, however, and a reverend father* of the oratory in France has treated this whimsy very seriously.

The Stoicians then, according to St. Austin, placing the chief happiness of man in virtue, that is, in the mind, the Epicureans placing it in volupty, that is, in the body, and the Platonists placing it in the enjoyment of God, the latter judged very wisely, that it was proper to prepare the way to truth by destroying, in the first place, the errors of those sects. They saw their own sublime doctrine would fall into contempt, if they published it among men immersed in sense, like the Epicureans, or even among the Stoicians, who gave the preference indeed to virtue, but who could not raise their conceptions up to something divine and immaterial, to something above mind as above body, to something knowable by pure intellect, and yet far superior to it, that is, up to God. They knew that they should not be heard, if they went about to teach men who believed atoms, or the four elements, to be the first principles of all things, that all things proceeded from an immaterial wisdom.† They considered farther, that the Epicureans being persuaded their senses never deceived them, and the Stoicians believing, like the Aristotelians, that although their senses might sometimes deceive them, yet they could not acquire, without the assistance of their senses, any knowledge of the truth of things, it would be to little purpose to tell either the one or the other that the only Being, which has a real existence, cannot be represented to the mind by any of the images of sense, and that this immutable Being is that alone which we conceive truly; because pure intellect, which alone perceives the truth of things, alone perceives the existence of this Being.

Now since Arcesilaus could not flatter himself that these sublime doctrines would be received, against the philosophical prejudices that prevailed in his time, it behoved him to look forward, and to convey the pure streams that flowed from the springs Plato had opened, as St. Austin‡ expresses himself in one of his letters, through a channel shaded and covered by brambles and thorns, lest they should be exposed to beasts that would render them foul and muddy. Nothing less than a submissive faith, such a faith, as he mentions in his letter to Consentius§ a faith

*Thomassin, De la Maniere d'etudier la Philos.

† N. B. This is said purely to do honor to Plato, for he was absurd enough to make matter and ideas first principles jointly with God.

‡ To Hermog. ep. 1. ed. Benedic. § Ep. 120. ed. Benedic.

that must precede reason in order to purify the heart, and to prepare the mind to comprehend what it ought to admit implicitly at first, could impose such doctrines, and nothing less than the authority of one who was God and man could impose such a faith. Now the Platonicians could produce no authority of this kind, nor show a God abased and humbled before the coming of Christ. They were in the right, therefore, to conceal their doctrines, till this great event happened. But as soon as it happened, they opened the whole secret of their theology and metaphysics. Some of them, indeed, were corrupted by the damnable curiosity of magic. But many of them acknowledged Jesus to be that God and man, in whom immutable wisdom and truth were incarnated, and by whose mouth the eternal essence had spoken to mankind.

Such are the notions that St. Austin endeavors to give in some of his epistles, and in his books against the Academics, to establish the opinion that Plato was a Dogmatist, and to account for the conduct of his sceptical followers. But this ingenious scheme hangs ill together. What has been said above, concerning the motives that Arcesilaus had to make a public profession of Scepticism, seems much more probable than what our African bishop advances. Plato had rivals and enemies among the philosophers, Aristippus and Diogenes the Cynic, for instance, who embarrassed him more than once. But in his time, and for some time after him, no school grew up that could vie with his. Aristotle, who founded one that became famous, heard Plato twenty years, that is, till Plato died. Epicurus did not come to Athens till Xenocrates was at the head of the Academy, nor begin to teach so soon; and Zeno and Arcesilaus were scholars of Polemo at the same time. Thus far the course of the Academy glided smoothly on. But here the contests began; and the subtilties of of the Portic were the more to be feared by Arcesilaus, because Zeno, who set up this rival school, had been received in the Academy, and had learned, like a spy, where and how it might be attacked with most advantage. Other dogmatic sects grew up and strengthened at the same time: and the surest way to divert their attacks, was to attack them all on this one principle established by Socrates, "nihil sciri, nihil percipi posse." If Arcesilaus had gone about to defend his master's doctrines, which were not easy to be defended, surrounded as he was by enemies, he must have been beat on every side; whereas by renouncing all pretensions to knowledge, he had nothing to defend, had no recrimination to fear, and might attack with his whole force. We may add, perhaps, a motive of pique to this of policy, for besides that Arcesilaus was piqued personally by Zeno, who employed the arms he had acquired in the Academy against that

school, nothing could be more provoking than the arrogance wherewith the Stoics exacted the same assent to their most extravagant paradoxes, as the mind gives to truths that are objects even of intuitive knowledge. Thus we may easily conceive, that it happened in philosophy on this occasion, as it has happened in religion on many. Excess on one side produced excess on the other. So Sabellianism gave occasion to Arianism, and the foppery of Rome to the rusticity of Geneva. So the dogmatical presumption of Zeno, who affirmed the world to be a rational animal, as confidently as he affirmed it to be light at noon,* pushed Arcesilaus to deny every kind and degree of knowledge.

But it is not enough to have shown that this account is probable, unless a short and obvious reflection be added to show, that it is impossible the motives St. Austin assigns to the conduct of Arcesilaus and the Academics should be true. Now, I ask, whether these philosophers could mean to conceal the doctrines of Plato, which had been publicly taught by more of his successors than St. Austin mentions, and which were contained in his writings? They might abandon the defence of these doctrines, and show little regard to them, but they could not mean to conceal them, and reserve them for a more proper conjuncture, as St. Austin asserts. They might do so the rather, and with a due regard to the honor of their founder, since by abandoning these they did not abandon him. He had jumbled two opposite characters most preposterously together. He was sometimes apparently a Dogmatist, and made even Socrates talk in that style. But still the known sceptical character of the master was the real character of the scholar. This character therefore Arcesilaus and Carneades assumed, as soon as it was for the honor and interest of their school to abandon the other, and deemed themselves, no doubt, more truly, Platonicians, than any of those who had been at the head of the Academy before them. I confound Arcesilaus and Carneades together, as Tully does: for though there might be some difference, which I will not have the trouble of considering, between the notions Carneades had, and those of Arcesilaus, concerning the causes of incomprehensibility; yet they both maintained, with equal zeal, and Carneades, it is said, with greater force of argument, that we are unable to arrive at the truth of things by sense or by reason.

If Socrates was not so great a genius, even with the help of his demon, as he has been represented, he was certainly something better than a genius. He was a very good man: and I find in myself an unwillingness to believe him absolutely a

*—Nec magis apparebit nunc lucere, quoniam stoicus, quàm hunc mundum esse sapientem.—Acad.

Sceptic, both on this account, and on account of that predilection, which you know that another good man, our friend, the bishop of Cloyne, has for him. That he might be such, as to physics and all the sciences which the Greeks called mathematics, or disciplines,* I can easily believe. Xenophon gave the lie to Plato, and all those who pretended that he taught them; and Socrates himself complained bitterly, when he heard the Lysis read,† of Plato's misrepresentations. No philosopher could be so easily, nor so safely, misrepresented. He preached, but he did not write: and we know nothing more of his philosophy than the scraps his auditors retained, some of which Xenophon has given us more truly, and Plato more copiously. He picked up scholars occasionally in the streets and public places of Athens, and was a missionary of virtue to them all, from Alcibiades down to the meanest citizen. He rather refuted the sophists, than labored to instruct directly: and this he did by a perpetual dissimulation of his own opinions, and an ironical deference to theirs; which manner might give an air of scepticism to all he said, even on moral subjects. In short, if I cannot believe him a Dogmatist, I will not believe him an absolute Sceptic.

Socrates may be compared to the Cimmerians, who were deprived of the light of the sun, but were not in utter darkness. He founded his ethics on probability, if you please; but it was on such a probability as Tully explains in his reply to Lucullus; such a probability as a wise man must rest upon, or all the rules of life will be subverted. If this was so, the difference between Socrates, and Arcesilaus, and Carneades was very great. They did not admit, at least the former did not, the faint light of probability, and could be scarce distinguished from those who professed Pyrrhonism: though St. Austin thought fit to employ even the former, very piously, in preparing the way for the reception of the gospel; for which he had no authority whatever, except that of his own wild imagination. For the dogmatism of Socrates and of Plato, and for a distinction between the old and new Academy, he had some indeed. Cicero introduces Lucullus, in the Academical Questions, comparing Arcesilaus to Tiberius Gracchus, and complaining, that as one of these disturbed the peace of an excellent commonwealth, so the other overturned philosophy, when it was brought to perfection. But Tully decides the controversy, without regard to probable arguments, by an appeal to fact. He had a bigot veneration for Plato. He had studied his works so long, and had familiarised himself with them so much, that he seemed to have lived with this philoso-

* Aul. Gellius. † Diog. Laertius.

pher, "ut penè cum his vixisse videar;" as he says of himself. He knew Plato better than St. Austin, and he asserted, that the new Academy was the same as the old,* if Plato, who founded it, was to be reckoned of the old, in whose works nothing was affirmed, who disputed for and against many things, inquired about all, and advanced none as certain.†

If Plato must be reckoned, notwithstanding this, a Dogmatist, it will be equally impossible to justify the regard, that the Christian fathers, most of them at least, paid to him themselves, and that they encouraged others to pay, nor the use that they made of his writings. They who called him the Homerical philosopher thought more justly of him, than they who called him the Attic Moses, or than they who still more profanely put him and Plotinus, and even Jesus Christ, in matters of doctrine on a level.‡ By doing this they defiled Christianity with many superstitious notions, and mixed their theology up with much of that imaginary science about divine, angelical, and human natures, which was derived from Egypt and the East, through Pythagoras and Plato chiefly, to the Greeks and the Romans, and from these two philosophers, through the school of Alexandria more than any other way; for dogmatical Platonism, which included both, flourished in that school more than it had ever done in the Academy; to the whole Christian world.

But farther, and to set this proceeding off in all the colors it deserves, are we sure that Plato, though a Dogmatist, was much in earnest on every point of theology which the fathers of the church took from him, and incorporated into the Christian system, as explanatory of it, or additional to it? He might not be so most certainly. Des Cartes was Dogmatist enough in all conscience; and yet, without derogating from this part of his character, we may believe that he was not very serious when he revived the whimsical notion of Gomez Pereyra, that beasts are automates, or pieces of clockwork, nor, perhaps, when he maintained the plenum. He had his particular reasons of prudence, to shelter himself from some attacks that he might apprehend, and of consistency to make the hypothetical parts of his philosophy hang the better together, as well as of conformity to certain received opinions. Plato might have reasons of the same, or of other kinds. It would not be hard to point out some such: and if he had no other, philosophical observation alone, and the desire of acquiring fame by the publication of a

* Academiam novam, quæ mihi vetus videtur.

† Nihil affirmatur—in utramque partem multa disseruntur, de omnibus quæritur, nihil certi dicitur.

‡ Vid. Ep. Nebridii ad Augus.

new and more sublime system, for so all things that are unintelligible in metaphycical theology are called, would have determined him to ransack ancient legends, as well as his own imagination, for every thing that might serve to this purpose. We may believe this the more easily, since there runs through all his works a tinselled embroidery of this kind, on a ground of low conceits and tedious irony:

> "Purpureus, latè qui splendeat, unus, et alter
> Adfuitur pannus."

Now if Plato may be justly suspected of such a proceeding, how ridiculous, as well as absurd and profane, ought we to esteem that of the fathers of the church? If the doctrines of Plato are conformable to the gospel, which I think they are not exactly in any one instance, except in some of the moral doctrines, it is absurd: if they are different, or more extensive in any respect, it is profane to make them a supplemental code to the evangelical system of faith. But if he published things that were neither dictated to him by his reason, nor even believed by him, whatever these things were, and how true soever they might appear on some other authority, it was sovereignly ridiculous to accept them in any degree for such on his. Of all this absurdity, profaneness, and ridicule, they who built up Christian theology were guilty. Instead of commenting Platonism by Christianity, they commented Christianity by Platonism. Instead of applying revelation to explain, and the authority of the revealer to confirm, what they thought to be true in his writings, they applied Platonic philosophy to introduce and explain Christian, and the authority of Plato to confirm what they received for true on the authority of Christ. They added the epistles to the gospels, and the doctrines of Paul to those of Christ; and to all these, the reveries of heathen philosophy, rabinical extravagance, and Christian enthusiasm, till the Apocalypse became a part of our Holy Scriptures, and the Athanasian creed a summary of our faith.

SECTION XV.

I do not expect, on this occasion, from you the answer I should be sure to have from persons more orthodox, than I know you to be, in the faith of the pretended Catholic church. Such persons would insist on the authority of the church, by which all this heathen lore has been sanctified, and ground this authority on passages of the Scriptures, as they ground the authority of the Scriptures on that of the church. This circular proof would

deserve no other answer than that of silent contempt. Clement of Alexandria opens an other way, to justify himself, and other fathers, for adopting so much heathen theology into Christianity. He supposes every system of Grecian and barbarian philosophy to have been a branch of the eternal truth,* and all these branches to have been united in the Christian system, like the trunk of the tree of all divine truth. Thus the doctrines of heathen theology, that were taught by Plato and Pythagoras, and derived from Egypt and the East, are not sanctified by a sort of retro-active power, but are made divine by their original. If now by these terms we do not understand, that the human mind rises up to the supreme mind, is united with it, and contemplates the ideas that are in it; if we do not understand, that the intellect of man is a part of the intellect of God, as the soul of man was thought to be a part of the Deity, or of the soul of the universe; in short, if we do not understand them according to any of those mystical, metaphysical notions, that Platonism propagated, and that Clement was very likely to intend, they are capable of receiving a very true sense. There are, no doubt, in theology some truths that human reason, the gift of God, and in this sense alone divine, is sufficient to demonstrate, according to those criterions of human knowledge, the things that are, and that we know to be as the author of all nature ordained that they should appear to creatures in our rank of being. Several such truths the pagan philosophers discovered. But then they blended them with monstrous errors, derived from various extremes, by planning the divine order and economy on the human, or by neglecting the phenomena of nature, or by making extravagant hypotheses to account for them. They discovered the unity of the Godhead, and they saw that worship is due from the creature to the Creator. But then they ran into ditheism, and gave up the unity, that they might save the goodness of the Supreme Being, which they imagined very falsely to be, as atheists objected that it was, inconsistent with the phenomena. They ran farther into polytheism, that they might provide a multitude of agents or ministers to execute the will of God, and to govern under him, or to be mediators and intercessors with him in behalf of mankind. As they took notions of mediation and intercession, so they took others of atonement and expiation, from the characters of men and of governments. Hence the offerings and sacrifices, sanguinary sacrifices, human sacrifices, such as the Carthaginians, our Druids, the Mexicans, and other barbarous people have instituted; from which examples, of the utmost depravation of human reason, that ignorance, superstition, and

* —Æternæ veritatis avulsam quandam particulam.—Strom. lib. 1.

habits of cruelty can beget, divines would sometimes prove that such sacrifices, and the appeasing of God by blood,* are agreeable to the natural reason of mankind.

It must be confessed, however, that even in these days, men, whose natural reason was not thus depraved, saw by the light of reason alone how abominable such rites as these were, and little by little, as their reason improved, how absurd all their other rites, and almost all their theological opinions were.† Polytheism was mitigated; idolatry was in good measure distinguished away, among the philosophers at least. Oracles and the arts of divination grew into contempt: and if heathenism was kept up by men above the vulgar, it seemed to be so only by the priests for lucre, and by others for fear of having no religion at all. Thus the way was prepared by reason for revelation, in the countries where Christianity first appeared, and which were enlightened by philosophy. Philosophy had begun to spiritualise religion, by exploding many of the gross, the carnal conceptions of heathen theology, and by substituting an inward devotion, purity of heart, and a pious disposition of mind, to the outward pomp and ceremony of worship. That this representation is true, the works of Plato alone would be sufficient to prove; although Eusebius‡ was desirous to make it believed, that no reformation had been made even in the opinions of philosophers before Christianity; but that, being then grown ashamed of their Polytheism and idolatry, they endeavored to conceal them under the pretence and disguise of allegory. In all cases, when Christianity was once established, the means of carrying this reformation of opinions to perfection were in the hands of Christian

* Vid. Thomassin, Maniere d'etudier la Philosoph. &c.

† It may be worth while to observe here what is said by a very great and worthy man, in a book written on the principles of Hutchinson, to show that Christianity is indeed very near as old as the creation. He admits, that this belief is of all others the most unreasonable, except as it is explained in the original. What now is the original, by the explanation of which this belief becomes reasonable? It was the decree of God, that a saviour should die to atone by his blood for the sins of men. It was therefore his command, that to keep this revelation in mind, the future sacrifice of the Saviour should be emblematically and prophetically represented by shedding the blood of beasts in sacrifices, accompanied with many typical and emblematical circumstances. No other invention could be so likely to preserve, and perpetuate, the knowledge and belief of a revelation so necessary to mankind. Strange absurdities! the bloody sacrifice to be made so many thousand years afterwards was that of the Son of God, of the very God, and the emblematical institution continued among men, who soon forgot that it was typical and emblematical only. Thus it served to no other purpose than to lead men into an opinion, that the deity was implacable, and sins unforgivable, unless he was appeased, and they were atoned for by the shedding of blood.

‡ Præp. Evangel.

philosophers and divines. It might have been expected too that revelation would unite, in one uniform system of theology, all the converted Pagans, whom reason had not been able to reconcile; since they had now, in the word of God a sure criterion, by which to try the truth of their opinions.

The very contrary happened. They differed as much as ever, and with uncharitableness and hatred that had been unknown to them before their conversion. Whilst they were Pagans, they disputed without quarrelling, and even embraced opposite sects without becoming enemies. We see the Stoic, the Epicurean, and the Academic meeting amicably together in Tully's works, which represent the manners of the age. They endeavor to refute one another; but they live in the utmost intimacy of friendship: and if Carneades was exasperated against the Stoics on account of their dogmatical, and, as we may venture to pronounce, their trifling but assuming airs, neither Tully nor even Cotta were so.* Nay the former inclined, as much as an Academic could incline to Stoicism: and Seneca, who was professedly of this sect, and he, speak often with the greatest regard of Epicurus, and with the greatest tenderness of their Epicurean friends.

How it came to pass that men who had embraced opposite opinions without acrimony, whilst they were heathens, became inveterate enemies for this very reason when they were Christians, or how they came to be more divided than ever, even when they had one common rule of faith and doctrine which they all acknowledge alike, is not very hard to conceive. Whilst they were merely philosophers, they were attached to some sect or other, not only by the illusions of their own imaginations, by their affections and passions, by ambition and private interest, but by prejudices and habits contracted early and sometimes before they were able to judge for themselves. To this sect, whichever it was, they adhered: and that which we may observe frequently in the political struggles of our miserable parties, happened, no doubt, in those theological contentions.† A false point of honor prevailed sometimes over the love of truth; it determined the will even against the judgment: and men chose rather to err with those with whom they had long erred, than go right in new company, or alone. But still as they were mere

* —— Contra quorum disciplinam ingenium ejus, Carneadis, exarserat. Tusc. Disp. l. 5.

† ———Cæteri primum antè tenentur adstricti, quàm, quid esset optimum, judicare potuerunt.———infirmissimo tempore ætatis, aut obsecuti amico cuidam, aut unâ alicujus, quem primum audierunt, oratione capti, de rebus, incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhærescunt.—Acad. Quaest.

philosophers, and had nothing but reason, their own or that of their party, to oppose to reason in every instance in which they differed, and as the particular opinions of no one sect interested the whole body of philosophers, the state or the church in any country, these men might differ, before their conversion to Christianity, without those incentives to uncharitableness and hatred, which acted so powerfully on the malignity of their hearts afterwards. As soon as this malignity could exert itself, under the specious pretence of zeal for the honor of God and for the purity of the faith, it broke out with violence. Every side assumed that the word of God spoke in favor of them, that the salvation of souls depended on believing as they believed, and that all those who dissented from them were guilty of heresy; for this word grew soon into fashion, and from having, as I believe, a very innocent signification at first, it came, like the word tyrant, and some others, to convey a very odious idea at last. Heretics then were enemies to God and rebels to his law. They were to be treated as such by the orthodox: and heresy and orthodoxy being determined by the strength and weakness of parties alternate, and therefore constant, persecution was established in the church of Christ.

SECTION XVI.

If we inquire after the causes of that strange multiplication of sects, which have grown up from the apostolical age to this, among Christians, it seems to me that they are to be found in the metaphysical madness of philosophers mixing with the enthusiasm of the first Christians, in the cabalistic practice of giving different senses to the same passages of holy writ, in the uncertainty of tradition, and in the use that a distinct order of men has made, in every Christian state, of these and other circumstances to acquire dominion over private conscience.

Men run naturally from extreme to extreme. The farther they have gone into one, the more likely it is, that when they recover from it they will hurry as far into another; so that reformation is often nothing more than a change of error. Thus it happened in the pagan theology. The professors of it, and the people in general, had acknowledged a divine nature; which was human nature under a different name, and placed in a different habitation. Their divinities, from Momus, the son of night, up to Jupiter the father of gods and men, were in truth celestial and immortal men, endued with more knowledge, and with more and greater powers; but with all these after the manner of men,

and divested neither of human passions nor of human vices. These objects of adoration were monstrous. So was the worship paid to them. But then, as fast as philosophers exploded these corporeal notions, for such they may be properly called, of the divine nature, and endeavored to spiritualise it in their thoughts by abstraction from the human, they refined theology, with much confusion and obscurity of ideas, from a system of physical into a system of metaphysical fables; and a sort of intellectual mythology took the place of the former. Mythology, properly so called, served in the infancy of science to conceal the ignorance of philosophers. Of the cosmogonia they made a theogonia. Such the poets taught, and multiplied polytheism by their supposed science, and very real flattery. Allegory succeeded and served to conceal the absurdity of theology. They who taught it grew as mad as their predecessors had been absurd, and very little less profane. The few remains of Pythagorean doctrines, the methphysical and theological parts of Plato's writings, and above all those of the latter Pythagoreans and Platonicians which are in our hands, will justify what is here advanced; for, surely, no men who were thought to be in their senses, and were suffered to go about without their keepers, did ever talk such nonsense as is to be found in Porphyry, Plotinus, Jamblicus, and those who have been infected with the same phrensy. Such of these philosophers as opposed Christianity, opposed to the marvellous of this theologythe marvellous of their own, and none of our angelical or seraphic doctors, none of our ravished mystics, ever rose higher in illuminations, visions, and rapturous unions with the divinity, than some of them. On the other hand, many of these philosophers became converts in different manners. Platonism mixed easily with Christianity; but they who retained most of the former, infected the latter with innumerable errors, and planted or watered all the heresies that started up daily in the first ages of the church. Such were the Gnostics or the Learned, who, under pretence of improving, corrupted the simplicity of the religion they had embraced. They who became afterwards the greatest lights of the church, apologists, confessors, saints, and martyrs, were determined to Christianity by their philosophy, as well as the others, and came full fraught with Platonism into the holy pale. But they used it more modestly. They made it the handmaid, not the rival, of Christianity: and though this handmaid governed the family, and took a principal share in ordering the whole scheme and economy of it, yet the authority of the mistress was always pretended. Justin owns that Platonism prepared him to be a Christian: and Origen, a man far superior to the good martyr, ran as Platonically mad, in the second century, as Picus of Mirandola, Ticinus, Patricius, or any of the renowned

Platonicians, in the fifteenth. I know not whether the despair of attaining any other way a full knowledge of divine truths, which Socrates and Plato had so often inculcated, might not dispose these men to receive a revelation, to prefer faith to uncertainty, and, since they could not fix their minds on these subjects by reason, to fix them by authority, as the disciples of Pythagoras did.

Though I ascribe so much to the mere influence of philosophy, and believe it to have been the frantic mother of a frantic offspring, I do not mean to exclude absolutely that of grace on this occasion, though I confess that I have no conception of it, nor to deny that this directed in some measure the other: and, to prove that I do not, I will quote the example and authority of St. Austin, to show how these two co-operated in him, and how the first prepared him, by God's immediate appointment, for the last, in one of the most sublime articles of Christian faith. The saint laments in the seventh book of his Confessions, the grievous errors in which he had been engaged concerning the divine nature, and the original of evil, on both of which he had followed the opinions of the Manichæans. He relates the steps by which he was delivered from these errors, as well as from the superstition of astrology and divination, and the approaches he made to truth by the helps that God procured him. After this he breaks out into ejaculations of thanks to God, who had taken pity on him, and had procured him some books of Platonic philosophy, wherein he found the divinity of the Word established by many arguments. Of the incarnation of the Word, indeed, he found nothing. But he found it afterwards in the Scriptures, and he remained persuaded that God had prepared him, by this accidental information, for what he was to learn when he should study the Scriptures concerning the humiliation of the Word made flesh;* the reasons of which persuasion he gives, in the twentieth chapter. Thus you see how Plato, in the wanderings of a wild imagination, had discovered, in part at least, one of the greatest mysteries of Christianity, and how God made use of this truth, which he who published it did not know to be such, for the conversion of one of the greatest doctors and saints of the church. What wonder is it that metaphysics, the very dotage of philosophy,

* Miseratus es terram et cinerem——procurasti mihi per quendam hominem, immanissimo typho turgidum, quosdam Platonicorum libros ex Græca lingua in Latinam versos, et ibi legi, &c.——Non quidem his verbis, sed hoc idem omnino multis et multiplicibus suaderi rationibus, quod in principio erat verbum, et verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat verbum——in quos me propterea priusquam scripturas tuas considerarem, credo voluisti incurrere, ut imprimeretur, &c.

should bear witness to some of those truths, which may come out of the mouths of babes and sucklings?

SECTION XVII.

Another cause of the multiplication of extravagant opinions and sects, in Christianity, has been the arbitrary practice of giving different senses to the same passages of the Bible. A practice derived from the Jewish masters, the worst certainly that can be followed if we seek truth, and are desirous to preserve any precision either in fact or argument. Among the lowest artifices, that have been employed by those who seek to impose their own inventions under some other and better authority than their own, this has been one of the lowest and grossest, though not the least successful. It is in truth a kind of forgery, since it serves to make an author say what he had no intention to say, or renders at the best uncertain what he did intend to say when he wrote with the greatest clearness. The Jewish rabbins have done by the Old, and our Christian rabbins by the New and Old Testament both, what Peter did by his father's will in our friend Swift's tale of a tub. The text was against him, but by a new combination of the same words, or syllables, or letters, he made it speak for him and support his claim. It had been well if Martin and John, and the rest of Peter's brethren, for he had many more which the historian thought it not worth his while to mention, had stood their ground like good caraites, and had adhered to the text in the plain and obvious meaning of it, instead of imitating the very men whom they have opposed, and whom they laugh at. But they have done otherwise. They have supported their decisions by the same unjustifiable means, by which the rabbinist Peter supported his. Nay they have done more, they have admitted divers codicils, and have, like him, supposed them to be of equal authority with the will, though it is plain that the father speaks in the will, and his stewards or other domestics in the codicils. Allow me another comparison. It may illustrate the folly, as the former explains the fraud, of this practice. The Chinese reverence much the table of Fohi, which must be nine or ten centuries older than Adam, according to their chronology. This table consists of several lines, some shorter, some longer, and placed in a certain order like that of a diagram or scheme, serving, as they imagine, to the design or demonstration of the most sublime knowledge. The learned men among them have been employed several thousand years in attempts to draw some of this sublime knowledge out of the table. The way they have

taken, and what other could they take, if they had leisure enough to take any? has been to make all the possible transpositions, and different combinations, of these lines, in hopes of affixing some sense to this mystical table. The consequence has been, that they have affixed several, and that they agree in none. Now though I am persuaded, that the accounts the Jesuits* give us of this table are imperfect, and that something more than barely these unequal lines, something hieroglyphical at least, belongs to it; yet whether it be so or no, the anecdote is equally apposite to my purpose: for in either case, the Chinese and Christian critics have been employed alike. If the table consists of unintelligible lines, and it would be the same if it consisted of unintelligible words, whereof Fohi has given no clue to explain and determine the sense, the Chinese critics have been employed just as reasonably as the Christian expositors of mysteries, neither fully nor plainly revealed by revelation itself. If it be said, that the table, which none but he who made it could explain, explains itself, as our Scriptures do in all the essential parts of them, the comparison holds still; for the learned Chinese must have done, as the learned Christians have done, and have made mysteries for some purpose or other where they found none. It is impossible by any means that art can find to see in the dark; but it is easy to contrive glasses that shall show the plainest and most uniform object in a mist, and under various forms in the clearest day. The first is a silly, and the last a knavish attempt. I said just now that it was a kind of forgery. I do not recall my words, but add, that in the case here supposed, the Chinese are much more excusable than the Christians; for if the Chinese have forged different words of Fohi, Christians have forged different words of God.

How can we lay less than this to their charge, when we consider in how many different, remote, and inconsistent senses, such as destroy one another, and such as are advanced on no authority but that of their own imaginations, they interpret the same passages of holy writ? There is, according to these doctors, a grammatical, a literal or historical, an allegorical or figurative, an anagogical or divine, and a tropological or moral, sense. Some, or all of these, may be applied to the same sentence, nay, to the same word. Light, in that noble passage of the book of Genesis, where it is said, "Let there be light and there was light," signifies very plainly, in the grammatical, literal, and only proper sense, the corporeal light which God created, and concerning which alone it was at all to the purpose to speak in that place. But divines, by their arbitrary power over the Scriptures,

* Scien. Sinica.

make it to signify the Messiah allegorically, and tropologically or anagogically the inward light of grace, or the outward splendor of celestial glory. Thus again, by virtue of the same power, Jerusalem, which is the name of a town, has been made to signify the vision of peace, the church militant, the church triumphant, and the soul of a believer.* The sense of no writings, neither sacred nor profane, can be ever fixed, if they remain subject to such licentious interpretations. These interpretations have served, and they could be intended to serve, by the Jews who set, and by the Christians who followed the example, no other purpose, than that of furnishing the rabbins of both religions with means of giving a color of divine authority to all their own inventions. The absurdities which the former have advanced on such interpretations, seconded by those of their oral law and cabbala, and which you may find in our modern writers, that were skilled in rabbinical learning, are innumerable, and pass all measure of probability; so that one cannot help being astonished, when some of our Christian divines lament most piously the loss of those rules, according to which the Jews interpreted their Scriptures, as they suppose; for that there were any such stated rules observed is but supposition.

It is more probable, that the Jews did, as the Christians have done; that they followed their several imaginations, or their several theological and even secular interests. This was the case among Jews and Christians both, and if it may be said, which is not very clear, however, that the latter have not fallen generally into so many puerilities and palpable errors as the others, the most unreasoning, the most ignorant, and the most absurd of men, yet they have rendered theology more voluminous, and, with respect to the divine nature and economy, more contentious than it was before. St. Austin seems to aim at a sort of composition about the interpretation of the Scriptures, in a letter to Marcellinus.† He says, that "how good soever any reason may appear, it is false and deceitful if it contradicts them; and that how clearly soever we may think any thing deduced from them, if the thing be manifestly against reason, we are deceived; it is not the true sense of the passages alleged; truth and they cannot stand in opposition." We may observe in this place, what is to be observed often in the writings of this saint, a jingle of words, that pretends to strength and precision, and has neither really.

The first proposition supposes a case that can never happen among reasonable men, who have received the Christian revelation for genuine, after a sufficient examination of the external and internal proofs. Such men, having found nothing that

* Vid. Calmet. † Ep. 143.

makes it inconsistent with itself, nor that is repugnant to any of those divine truths which reason and the works of God demonstrate to them, will never set up reason in contradiction to it, on account of things plainly taught, but incomprehensible as to their manner of being. If they did, their reason would be false and deceitful: they would cease to be reasonable men: and St. Austin says nothing to the purpose, if he confounds these things with such as imply contradiction, and means an opposition of reason to the former only. But if we could suppose, or if St. Austin could mean to suppose, that they who followed the rule he lays down in another place, the rule of believing first, in hopes of understanding afterwards, should discover things, when they came to examine in order to understand, that implied contradiction, his conclusion would be false. They would be obliged in this case to reject the revelation, not their reason; or to fall at once into a general and particular absurdity. The general absurdity of renouncing the faculties God had given them of distinguishing truth from falsehood, good from evil; and the particular absurdity of renouncing, in favor of the internal, that very rule by which they had judged in favor of the external proofs of this revelation.

The second proposition admits and encourages the very practice we censure so justly, for which the saint was so famous, and by which he contributed so much to promote contentions in his own days, and to perpetuate them to ours. The practice of deducing doctrines from the Scriptures, that are not evidently contained in them, for if they were evidently contained in them, they could not be said to be deduced from them, is admitted. It is admitted, that these deductions may be manifestly against reason. Several such there were, and among them some of his own. Reason is made the judge of doctrines thus deduced; but when reason condemns any, divines, the inventors or fautors of them, are at liberty to evade the objections they cannot answer by interpretations of the same passages in some other and new sense. Who does not see, that the direct tendency of this practice is exactly the same as the event has proved it to be? It composes and propagates a religion, seemingly under the authority of God, but really under that of man. The principles of revelation are lost in theology, or disfigured by it: and whilst some men are impudent enough to pretend, others are silly enough to believe, that they adhere to the gospel, and maintain the cause of God against infidels and heretics, when they do nothing better, nor more than espouse the conceits of men, whom enthusiasm, or the ambition of forming sects, or of making a great figure in them, has inspired. If you ask now what the practice of the Christian fathers, and of other divines, should have

been, in order to preserve the purity of faith, and to promote peace and charity, the answer is obvious, and so evidently agreeable to right reason, that the modestest man alive might make it before an œcumenical council without blushing. They should have adhered to the word of God; they should have paid no regard to heathen philosophy, Jewish cabbala, the sallies of enthusiasm, or the refinements of human ingenuity. They should have embraced, and held fast the articles of faith and doctrine, that were delivered in plain terms, or in unequivocal figures; they should not have been dogmatical, where the sense was doubtful, nor have presumed even to guess, where the Holy Ghost left the veil of mystery undrawn. If the council should decree, that this answer was erroneous, and that the system of Christianity would have been incomplete and insufficient without these adventitions helps, let us make no scruple of saying, that the council would decree blasphemously, as more councils than one have done, since they would decree, that infinite wisdom had not proportioned means to ends, or that the ends of infinite wisdom were more or other than the gospel of Christ assigns.

SECTION XVIII.

The uncertainty of that precarious tradition, whose authority has been so magnified, may be set down as a third cause of the multiplication of doctrines and sects in the Christian church. The truth of facts, however notorious, and even of those that men have the least interest or temptation to falsify, is trusted very unsafely to tradition. How much more unsafe must this conveyance be, when it is that of opinions and doctrines, intricate, and therefore easily mistaken, disputed or disputable, and therefore industriously misrepresented? Barrow, in his exposition on the creed, takes away this great foundation of theology; for though he asserts, that there are proper and sufficient means to discern the genuine doctrines and dictates of Christianity, yet he leaves us in effect none but the writings of the evangelists, and the epistles of two or three apostles who had been disciples. According to him and to right reason, the first and best way of preserving doctrines is to preserve them in the writings of the authors of them; though even this cannot be deemed absolutely secure. It is far from being certain, that genuine Peripatetism is every where plainly read in the writings of Aristotle, as they are come down to us: and if Pythagoras and Socrates had written, or if the works of Zeno were extant, we should be best assured, better than any other way, what their philosophies were, but

still not without some possibility of error. Another way of preserving doctrines, is to preserve them in the writings of disciples, that immediately received them from the authors. Thus the writings of Plato and Xenophon tell us, with a good degree of certainty, what Socrates taught: and yet these writings give very different and contradictory accounts of rhe Socratic philosophy. The next way that Barrow mentions is the preservation of doctrines in the writings of those who wrote at larger distances of time, as those of the Stoics were preserved in the writings of Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus. This way he allows to be more imperfect than the former, because every writer is apt to misapprehend and misrepresent—to do somewhat more than transcribe —to comment and descant—to adorn and set out, to confirm or confute the doctrine they relate, in order thereto representing it with advantage to their purpose. The last way is that of oral tradition, the most liable to defect and corruption of any according to this juducions expositor. Men do as before, and in this case with greater advantage, "accommodate doctrines to their own prejudices, inclinations, and designs. The farther such tradition departs from the original spring, the more subject it is to contract such alterations and impurities. Every doctrine, thus propagated, is like a stream at the head, small and narrow, but clear and pure. Proceeding on, it grows larger and fouler. So tradition swells, by taking in what oblique channels of private fancy and pragmatical invention discharge into it, and by receiving tincture from particular inclination or politic design it grows muddy and feculent."

The genuine doctrines and dictates of Christianity, have not been conveyed to us by the first of these four ways; for the Saviour published his gospel by preaching, and by occasional discourses, and not by writing. But they have been preserved by the second; for two of the four evangelists had been disciples from the first, and witnesses, not only of all that had passed during his mission, but of his resurrection. They had, therefore, received immediately from the author the doctrines they published in his name. Who the other two were, it is impossible to say with sufficient assurance, amidst the fabulous or little authentic reports of ecclesiastical writers. But if Mark was the convert, the scholar, and the amanuensis of Peter, his testimony comes nearer to that required under this head, since Peter was a disciple, one of the twelve, than the testimony of Luke, who belonged in all these relations to Paul; since Paul was no disciple, neither one of the twelve, nor one of the seventy, if, in truth, there was any such seventy, had received nothing immediately from Christ, nor had any apostolical commission, except that which he assumes in the Acts of the Apostles written by

Luke, and dictated, probably, by himself. I say probably, because it is possible Luke might have been an eye and ear witness of part of all he relates in the Acts, as St. Jerome observes; though he could be no more than an hearsay witness of what he relates in the gospel, since he owns, in the beginning of it, that he wrote, like many others, what he had been told.

When divines urge, on this occasion, that the differences between Matthew and Mark, as well as others, are accounted for, and an entire harmony of the gospels is established, by critics, so that they all confirm one another, infidels, I know will cavil, and sometimes plausibly, against many things that must be assumed to make this harmony appear, and to reconcile these differences. When it is urged again, that the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and an immediate inspiration being bestowed on all the disciples in an eminent manner and alike, they are all to be esteemed witnesses alike, and they all received the doctrines of Christianity immediately from God, the author of it, though not by the mouth of the Saviour whilst he was in the flesh. I know too, that the same men will not remain without a reply. For instance, they will insist that all this, if allowed, will prove nothing in favor of Mark nor Luke, nor even Paul himself, who were neither of the twelve nor of the seventy; after which they will add, perhaps, *ex abundantia*, that none of these three having been designed by God to stand in the place of that disciple who had betrayed Jesus, and to fill up the number of the apostles, Matthias alone, with the eleven, could pass in any sense for one of those disciples who had received the doctrines of Christianity immediately from the author of them; though the seventy might be, as it is said they were, appointed to be witnesses of the resurrection. Erasmus, in the first chapter of his paraphrase on the Acts, makes Christ say to all the disciples, that the Holy Spirit, which he had breathed upon them, and which he had promised should descend upon them from above, would not only recall to their minds all that he had taught them, but suggest likewise to them whatever else it might become necessary for them to know. But the cavillers, of whom we speak, will urge, that these words were added by Erasmus for reasons very obvious, and are not contained in the text; nor is even the sense of them implied so far as to authorise the disciples, and much less any that were not of their number, to add any thing to the conditions of salvation that Christ himself had imposed. Such cavils will be raised, I say; but they will deserve to have little weight, as long as it is out of dispute that we have in our hands the gospels of Matthew and John, who give themselves to us for eye-witnesses of all that Christ did, and of all that happened to him, and ear-witnesses at the same time of all

the doctrines he taught.* Two channels were as sufficient as four to convey these doctrines to the world, and to preserve them in their original purity. The manner too, in which these evangelists recorded them, was much better adapted to this purpose than that of Plato, or even of Xenophon, to preserve the doctrines of Socrates. The evangelists did not content themselves to give a general account of the doctrines of Christ in their own words, nor presume, in feigned dialogues, to make him deliver their opinions in his own name, and as his own doctrines. They recorded his doctrines particularly, they recorded them in the very words in which he taught them, and they were careful to mention the several occasions on which he delivered them to his disciples or others. If therefore Plato and Xenophon tell us, with a good degree of certainty, what Socrates taught, the two evangelists seem to tell us, with much more, what the Saviour taught, and commanded them to teach. In a word, we may say, on these grounds, that the genuine doctrines of Christianity have been preserved much better than those of heathen philosophy, in the second way of preserving doctrines, though they have not been preserved in the first and best, as some of the others have been.

The third and fourth ways of preserving doctrines, which Barrow mentions, have so near a relation, that they may be thrown into one. They who decide about doctrines, or who write about them, at great distances of time from the first disciples, are more easily imposed upon by traditions, and can more easily impose them on others. Both these things fell out, and no case can be well supposed wherein the truth of fact, or the purity of doctrine, was so liable to be corrupted, or was in fact so much, or so soon corrupted, as in the propagation of Christianity. The mixed crowd of Jews and heathens that embraced it, and the very manner of propagating it, rendered this corruption unavoidable.

The Jews had begun long before this time to corrupt their own religion. They had borrowed many superstitious opinions from Egypt, and the eastern nations; and Pythagorean and Platonic metaphysics, which they had entertained after they became acquainted with the Greeks, and lived under the domination of the Seleucides and the Ptolemies, were imported both by them and the heathen converts into Christianity; by the Hellenist Jews more than by those of Palestine, and by the heathen more than by either. Christianity began in Judea; it derived its authority and its proofs from the Jewish Scriptures, the authenticity and

* N. B. I speak of both alike, though I am not ignorant of what has been said that might weaken the authority of Matthew's gospel.

divinity of which it every where supposes. The author of it was a Jew; and, as the religion he instituted tended not directly to destroy Judaism, so the Christian church at Jerusalem conformed long, as Christ himself had done constantly, to the ancient religion. On all these accounts, the Jewish converts might regard Christianity as a branch of Judaism, and take the same liberties of retrenching, of adding, of altering, with one, as had been taken with the other. They had acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah foretold by their prophets. In this, they had gone beyond the Pharisees, who rejected him, as the Pharisees had gone, in receiving all the books of the old Testament, beyond the Sadducees, who received the Pentateuch, and rejected all the others. The Pharisees had added an oral to the written law. They believed the resurrection of the dead, the immortality of the soul, future rewards and punishments, the metempsychosis, and other doctrines utterly unknown to Moses, which they accommodated somehow or other to his law. They made up a new system of theology, by such accommodations of the law to their traditions and their philosophy. Why should not the Christian Jews we speak of make up a new system likewise, by blending all these and Christianity together, as they could best reconcile them? The example of Philo, who did not profess Christianity indeed, but who found means to make the Platonic opinions of the deity, and those of Moses agree, might encourage them in the attempt.

Much in the same manner the pagan converts might, and certainly did proceed. They found a great analogy between the most sublime and important doctrines of Christianity, and those which some of their philosophers had taught, and they might easily be led from hence to think, that a sameness of doctrine denoted a sameness of authority. This will appear the more probable, if we consider, that not only some heretics, but several of the most orthodox fathers, believed all those to be illuminated from above, who purified their minds, separated their souls as much as possible from their bodies, and died this philosophical death in order to arrive at a philosophical regeneration, according to the notions that metaphysical enthusiasm had established.* Thus, Justin the martyr makes Christ to have been known, in some sort, to Socrates.† It could not be otherwise. The soul of Socrates was a purified soul, and Christ the illuminating word. St. Austin was much of the same mind, and says little less than Justin of this philosopher.

* Plato, Plut. Jamb. et alibi.—liberatio à corpore celebratissima mors est philosophica.

† Apol. i.

The Eclectic sect, which Potamo founded about this time at Alexandria, might give farther occasion to the heathen converts to corrupt Christianity. This sect professed a detachment from all sects, in the search of truth: they were

"Nullius addicti jurare in verba magistri."

They delivered themselves from the chains of philosophical bigotry. They might hold some to one and some to another system of philosophy in the main, as their different judgments or prejudices inclined them; but they asserted the reasonable liberty of embracing truth wherever they found it, and without any regard to the tenets even of that sect towards which they leaned the oftenest and the most. Sotion passed for a Stoic, and his scholar Seneca professed himself such.* Yet Sotion was fond of Pythagorean doctrines, and Seneca† made no scruple of borrowing from Epicurus. Plotinus was a Platonician, and yet he adopted doctrines, such, we may presume especially, as were subtile and mysterious, both from the Stoics and the Peripatetics. Clement‡ was a Christian, who taught Christianity by his public lessons at Alexandria, and who defended it by his writings, and yet he approved this manner of philosophising; we may conclude too, that it was the method of that school. Ammonius was the preceptor of Plotinus and of Origen. Plotinus deserted Christianity, and bred up an inveterate enemy to it in Porphyry; or if he continued a Christian to the last, as Eusebius says somewhere that he did, for no better reason, perhaps, than to keep a name of so great renown in the Christian catalogue, he dressed up his Christian with so much Pagan theology, that he might pass for a professor of either. Origen, on the other hand, who had heard Clement as well as Ammonius, was such a zealous Christian, that he aspired to suffer martyrdom, like his father, and did actually execute one sort, that of castration on himself; by which however he avoided another, that of temptation. Origen signalised himself in the eclectic method. His warm imagination carried him into allegorical and cabalistical interpretations of the Scriptures, and his immense reading furnished him with a multitude of notions borrowed from pagan theology. Many of these he introduced into Christianity; and his book of principles was a repertory of the most extravagant opinions. Heretical too they were declared by men less learned, less zealous, perhaps, but certainly more politic, and more circumspect in observing the course that orthodoxy took, than himself.

From what has been said it is evident, that such a motley

* Senec. Ep. 58. † Senec. Passim. ‡ Strom. l. i.

crowd of Jews and heathens, as the first converts to Christianity were, could not fail to mix a leaven of Judaic and heathen theology into the Christian system, and thereby to swell, to perplex, and ferment it. Had they kept closely to what the Saviour taught, all this had been avoided; and supposing Christianity to have been purely a human invention, it had been the most amiable and the most useful invention that was ever imposed on mankind for their good. But the extensions of it, and the engraftments that were made on this divine stock, by mere human philosophy, and by religious prejudices already entertained, produced a system, or rather caused divers systems to grow up, of fantastical theology. Christianity, as it came out of the hands of God, if I may use the expression, was a most simple and intelligible rule of belief, worship, and manners; which is the true notion of a religion. As soon as men presumed to add anything of their own to it, the human alloy corrupted the divine mass, and it became an object of vain, intricate, and contentious science. Such it continued to be, and the very manner in which truth was propagated, served to establish error.

The doctrines of Christianity, and the facts that proved the divinity of it, were published by discourse not by writing. Christ preached; he was the greatest of preachers, and he sent his disciples out to preach.* They pursued their mission through different countries; and as fast as they formed a church in one, they hastened to another. At least this was the practice of St. Paul, who scattered about more spiritual seed than all the rest, and more widely. Peter was a very itinerant missionary too, if we give credit to Eusebius, which I do very seldom. This writer makes him travel over a great part of Asia Minor, and even to the people of Pontus; because he speaks of these nations, though not of his preaching to them, in his first epistle. It is much more likely that he continued in Palestine and the neighborhood, and that, perhaps, he never went even to Rome, whither you pretended catholics send him, that you may impose, as you have done without proof and against common sense, the ecclesiastical tyranny of the bishops of that see, his supposed successors, on the Christian world. Paul indeed was a great traveller, as I have said, moving about from place to place almost continually during the greatest part of the time that passed between his baptism and his death; that is, according to the calculation of Erasmus, thirty-five years. He went over the countries, where Peter taught, more than once. He had been in Arabia before. He visited Greece and most of the islands. He penetrated beyond Thracia

* Summus ille ecclesiastes.—verbum et sermo Dei.—Eras. de Rat. Concion.

and Macedonia into Illyria. He returned into Palestine, and was sent in chains from thence to Rome.

How these two apostles preached, for of the rest we have no need to speak, and should have little to say, may be seen by their public discourses recorded in the Acts, and might be guessed by the style and matter of their epistles. To show how they succeeded in their missions, one example will be sufficient. Paul had preached eighteen months or two years at Corinth, and had settled a church there. The Corinthians did not renounce Christianity as soon as he had left them; but they corrupted it both in opinion and practice, and fell back into all their former habits of vice and debauchery. It was, on this occasion, that the apostle wrote his two epistles to the Corinthians, and in them we see the particular errors and abuses that were grown in a short time to a great head in that city. Among these, it is to our present purpose to mention some. The taint of heathen philosophy remained upon them; and they had contracted a gnostical contempt for the simplicity of the gospel, and of evangelical teachers.— False apostles from Judea had introduced superstitious opinions and practices, and had persuaded them to regard the law of Moses as necessary to be observed with that of Christ. They were divided into sects, and affected pre-eminence according to the dignity they ascribed to those by whom they had been baptised, to Apollos, to Cephas, to Paul. For these, and for many other things, they are severely reproved in the first of the two epistles I have mentioned: and though St. Paul seems satisfied in the second with their submission and amendment, yet is it certain, that the same errors and abuses continued or revived in the church of Corinth, and in others. Jerom* says in general, that even in his time the remains of them appeared in Achaia, and St. Austin,† taking notice in particular of the superstitious washings of the feet, laments, that the church of Christ was subjected to more than Judaical servitude under the load of external observances.

It was easy to intermix, in this manner of promulgating the gospel, as many philosophical and pharisaical conceits as the prejudices or purposes of the several preachers of it required: and when they were once well mingled together, as tradition varied those of one sort, or multiplied those of another, public writings and ecclesiastical authority were added to increase and perpetuate the confusion in which Christianity was delivered down to posterity, and in which it continues even at this day. A state not to be quite parallelled by that of any other religion, as I believe; neither by the Mahometan, however divided, nor by that of Foe,

* Præfat. secundi lib. in ep. ad Galatas.

† Ep. ad Januarium.

into how many sects soever it has been broken among the eastern nations. But we must not imagine, that the diversity of sects, and the opposition and confusion of doctrines, which were principal, were sole causes of the uncertainty of the traditions of the primitive church, or were caused solely by the manner of promulgating Christianity. Other causes of this division and confusion existed and concurred, either mediately through them, or by their own immediate effects, to corrupt tradition, and hinder the Christian system from acquiring any appearance of consistency.

SECTION XIX.

To collect instances of all the extravagances which were broached at that time, which almost choked the tender shoots of Christianity, and which grew up with them, like weeds among the corn, would be endless and needless both. I will recall one alone of the enthusiasm that prevailed, and of the impudence with which some men imposed on the simplicity of others. We find it in Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians. The effect of his first, whatever that was, encouraged him to write in this more plainly and more bitterly against the false teachers, and more highly in praise of himself, his authority, and his merit, which he scruples not to prefer to that of all the other apostles. On this occasion it appears, that the false teachers had the front to assure, and to make the first Christian converts believe, that they had an immediate communication with celestial beings. This gave them an air of superiority to which St. Paul thought it not proper to submit, as indeed it was not, since that would have been to submit his authority to theirs, and the gospel he taught to the gospels they taught. The least he could do, and it is observable that his modesty would allow him to do no more, was to oppose his own raptures and visions to those which these men pretended to have, and to declare, that he too had been wrapped up into the third heaven, either in body, or spirit, where he had learned things incomprehensible and ineffable.

What has been said very summarily may serve, however, to shew, that it was not possible traditions derived from the first, and through the most early ages of Christianity, should convey either facts or doctrines down with a due authenticity and precision, unless a continued miracle had subsisted to alter the nature of things, and to produce effects repugnant to their causes. But there remain some circumstances still, which deserve to be mentioned. It has been observed already, that the fondness of the first Christians for pagan theology carried them, not only to

borrow from it, but to forge books under the names of such as had been famous divines in the East, in Egypt, and elsewhere. Even this did not content them. They not only introduced, with equal absurdity and falsehood, these authorities to confirm the most sublime mysteries of Christianity, and to teach men the way to salvation,* but they composed a multitude of different gospels, not less, I believe, than forty, to give the authority of a divine original to all the fabulous traditions, superstitious practices, and extravagant doctrines, which were adopted, or invented by the different sects. Thus the Gnostics had their gospel; the Marcionites had theirs; the Valentinians had theirs, and even Judas Iscariot had his.† Apocalypses, or books of revelations, were not so numerous: but of these too there were several. One of these particularly, the apocalypse of St. Paul, I could almost wish that we had, since it pretended to relate the ineffable things he saw in the third heaven. But it is lost as well as others: and if that which we have under the name of St. John had been lost likewise, there might have been some madmen the fewer, and Christianity would not have suffered so much.

There was another practice in the primitive church, which may find its place properly enough here, because it served to corrupt the traditions of the church, and to fill the ecclesiastical annals with lying legends; though it did not corrupt the doctrines of Christianity so directly as the others. The practice I mean is, that of writing pious romances, under the pretence of writing the lives of saints, and the deaths of martyrs. This practice grew so frequent, and these romances were held in such esteem, that a certain ecclesiastic of the Greek church, one Metaphrastus,‡ I think, published a treatise of criticism on the subject and laid down rules for the composition of them. Christian historians, like those of Greece who wrote after the expedition of Alexander, imagined they could never add too much of the marvellous to so many marvellous events. Their readers seemed to be of the same mind: and history became romance in order to please. These histories too of saints and martyrs were panegyrics as well as romances, and had the same effect that Tully ascribes somewhere to the funeral orations of the Romans, which corrupted tradition first, and history afterwards. Well might they have this effect, when they were authorised by the greatest and most admired fathers of the church: when such a man as St. Austin, for instance, read such legends in the pulpit to his congregation, and kept and published accounts of miracles

* Via ad salutem——indicata.
† Cod. Apoc. Nov. Testam. of Fabricius.
‡ Vid. Bailett's Prof. to the Lives of the Saints.

wrought by the relics of saints and martyrs. Since the preachers propagated these idle tales, it is not wonderful that the hearers believed them, and that pious lying became the voice of tradition, in ages when any thing might be imposed on Christian auditories, and that which was least understood was most admired in them, according to the character given of these flocks by St. Gregory of Nazianze, in a very remarkable anecdote related by St. Jerom.* But these romances had an effect still worse; for they introduced into Christianity a sort of polytheism and idolatry, too nearly akin to heathenism. Let not your zeal for the honor of saints, martyrs, and confessors make you think the expression too hard. I can quote you one much more hard from Erasmus, for whom you profess the same veneration that I have. In the preface to De Marca, before his paraphrase on St. Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, after saying, that "this apostle did not suffer any mortal to be cried or preached up nor the praise of the gospel to be transferred to men," he adds, "nunc quidem velut antiquato Christo novum idolatriæ genus invehunt, ex hominibus, ut ita loquar, deos facientes." The church, your church I mean, has ascribed divinity, little if at all better than the heathen did. Some of your saints, though they were not public debauchees were very ill men: and if you consult Cyprian, whose authority is so much respected, and for the same reason, by the Christian clergy of every sect, you will find, that they who suffered as confessors were very often men of the most profligate morals. If they were such after their sufferings there is room to believe, that some of the martyrs were such before they suffered, and when they suffered.

No monuments can be more uncertain, none more precarious, than those of Christian tradition. Other traditions grow more and more so by time. These were never more so than at first. Ask your acquaintance, Dr. Waterland, whether he has found the tradition of the three first ages of the church direct, clear, and uniform in support of the consubstantiality of the Son to the Father, which is a doctrine that he defends most strenuously. He will assure you, that he has found it to be so. He will not be able, however, to prove it any more than Bishop Bull has done, after all his boasts of the unanimity of the fathers, and even with the help of forced constructions, and indirect proofs. As little will he or any other divine be able to defend, on this authority, several doctrines, that they hold, or to justify themselves, for not holding several that they reject. Even your divines, who lay so much stress on tradition, are pleased to abandon it, as well as ours, in cases wherein it seems to carry

* Ep. ad Nepotian.

the greatest authority, because it is immediately derived from the apostles. Thus, I believe, that abstinence from blood, which was enjoined as much as abstinence from fornication by the apostles in a solemn council, is at this time required by no doctor, except Dr. Delany. Thus again, there are, I suppose, very few millenarians left, if even Mr. Whiston be still of the same opinion, though the year one thousand seven hundred and twenty is past, and the millennium not begun. In short, by partial traditions they can prove or disprove any thing. By universal traditions almost nothing. This very doctrine of a millennium was opposed at the close of the second century:* and a certain priest, one Caius, who believed that the Apocalypse ascribed to St. John was written by Cerinthus, ascribed this opinion not to the evangelist, but to the heretic. Jerom, Austin, Gregory the Great, or the Saint as he is called with less reason, and divines much more modern than these, have interpreted the passages of the Apocalypse, that establish the millennium, in another sense: and a man, who should profess to expect it at this day, or to believe the doctrine, would be treated as a visionary. But yet we must, I think, receive this tradition, so generally rejected; or reject all traditions, even those as generally received.

Let me say something more, which occurs to me on the subject of the millennium. Irenæus is a father much quoted and much respected. Irenæus had seen Papias and Polycarp, and was himself a disciple of the disciples of St. John. All these were Millenarians: and thus the first authors of apostolical traditions taught this doctrine as apostolical. Justin the Martyr, and Tertullian, were Millenarians likewise. Justin was the first father, I believe, who took notice of the Apocalypse, ascribed it to St. John, and founded his belief of the millennium upon it, in the dialogue with Tryphon. Tertullian goes farther. He maintains the Apocalypse against the Marcionites, and affirms, that the New Jerusalem, to be built by the hand of God, and to descend from heaven, was known to Ezekiel, and had been seen by the apostle St. John; nay, that the plan, or model of it, had been seen in his time suspended in the air forty days together, that it might be known again, when it should actually exist on the earth. Let it not be said, that I insist on the authorities of a weak man, and of a madman. I might do so, in this case, with as good reason as divines have for insisting on them in so many others. But the point I insist upon is this. The doctrine of the millennium was an apostolical doctrine, and taught as such by the immediate successors of the apostles. It was op-

* Euseb. Hist. Eccles. lib. 3.

posed, indeed, near two centuries afterwards by an obscure priest, who denied it to be the doctrine of St. John, because he denied St. John to be the author of the Apocalypse. But the doctrine was founded on original tradition as well as on the Apocalypse: and therefore whatever interpretations were made of these revelations in after times, the tradition was too fresh to be shaken. What shall we say now? Were the traditions concerning the millennium of doubtful authority in the first ages of the church? In that case, tradition is no rule at all. Were they uniform? How comes this doctrine to be exploded?

The third and fourth ways, that is, the two worst, of preserving doctrines, which Barrow mentions, have so near a relation to one another, that one is the necessary consequence of the other. They, who decide about disputable and disputed facts or doctrines, at great distances of time, may be easily imposed upon by tradition, and may easily impose by authority. Tradition is all that time growing corrupt. If it become false, they decide and they write falsely; if uncertain, uncertainly. The Nicean council decided against Arius: and yet, if we give credit to Petavius, whom it was more easy to silence by authority, than to refute by fact and by reason, the Fathers of the three first centuries were little better than Arians. How came the Fathers of the fourth to decree so positively and so precisely in favor of a consubstantiality, about which the tradition had been neither positive, precise, nor unanimous; though Bishop Bull has ventured to assert that the Ante-Nicean Fathers had agreed on this subject, "ad unum." Could any man, who had not the front of a controversial writer, affirm in this manner, when he knew, as Bull knew, that eighty Fathers who condemned Paul of Samosata, denied the homoüsion or consubstantiality of the Son with the Father?

Will it be urged, that the four gospels are as old, and even older than tradition; that the orthodox doctrine concerning the Trinity is established in them, and in the other Scriptures of the New Testament, by all which tradition is to be controlled and corrected? I apprehend, that the answer will not be sufficient. Some will assert, that the Scriptures, far from establishing the Nicean doctrine, vindicate, by their whole tenor, the supremacy of the Father, and declare the subordination of the Son. But let it be, that the gospels received into the canon are favorable to the orthodox belief; how do we know, that the other gospels were exactly conformable to these, on a matter of so much nice definition? Might not our learned and subtile theology find the task infinitely harder, if we had those gospels, to create a harmony between three or four dozen, than between four? The council of Laodicea admitted four, and rejected all the rest. But

it is very possible, that this council might proceed, as councils have generally done, under the influence of an ecclesiastical faction, and decree accordingly; or else on some such reasons as Irenæus called a demonstration.* There are four parts of the world. There are four cardinal winds. There have been four covenants under Adam, Noah, Moses and Christ. There can be but four gospels therefore. I omit some other proofs, just as demonstrative as those, upon all of which he did, and the council might determine that there could be neither more nor less than four gospels; though several traditions authorised several others.

The truth is, that as every man, in the most early days of Christianity, judged of his own inspiration, and of the gifts of the spirit he received, so every church judged of the inspirations of authors, and of the divine authority of books. The first led to the last, and those authors were deemed inspired, and those books were canonised, in which every particular church found the greatest conformity with her own sentiments. It is astonishing to consider how far this extravagance was carried. To consider, for instance, that Clement of Alexandria should look on an apocalypse of Peter as genuine, and it should be rejected afterwards. That St. Paul should insert in his epistles several passages of the apocalypse of Elias, as Origen assures that he did, and it should be refused admittance into the canon. But it is still more astonishing to observe how much respect Origen himself had for the visions of Hermas, and the oracles of the Sybil, as well as others of the fathers. Irenæus, having cited the former, uses this expression, "Scriptura pronunciavit:"* and honest Justin, in his admonition to the Greeks, exhorts them in a most solemn manner to believe the ancient and venerable Sybil, who was extraordinarily inspired by Almighty God.

I conclude from the little that has been said on a most voluminous subject, that as tradition furnishes very precarious anecdotes to those who write at great distances of time, so it may become difficult, nay impossible, to ascertain the authority even of books that were written, perhaps, at the time they suppose themselves to have been written, if the attempt to fix their authenticity, and to reduce them into a canon, is made at a great distance of time. They may be neither received nor rejected on grounds absolutely sure. They may be rejected at one time, and received at another: a remarkable example of which we find in the adventures of the Apocalypse. Whether this book was written by John the evangelist, John the priest, Cerinthus, or some other visionary, it passed for a composition of the evangelist, and maintained great credit as such in the church for some centuries

* Lib. 3. † Lib. 4.

before the council of Laödicea. This council left it out of the canon in the year three hundred and sixty: and although Asiatic bishops might pass, in this case, for judges more competent than those of the West, the council of Carthage put it into the canon in the year three hundred and ninety-seven. Some Spanish councils, and others, I believe, in the West did the same. Anathema, that convincing argument, was employed against all gainsayers: and as the mist thickened, it was universally admitted into the canon of the New Testament.

To sum up the whole in one short proposition. Ecclesiastical tradition has been, from the first and purest ages, founded for the most part, in ignorance, superstition, enthusiasm and fraud. He who pretends to clear the reverend fathers, by whom tradition was principally conveyed down from age to age, and to deny this charge, must be very ignorant himself, or very impudent. Sometimes they show their learning, like Justin, who took the inscription "Semoni deo sancto," on the statue of a god of the Sabines, for an inscription on the statue of Simon the magician. Sometimes their logic, and the strength of their reasoning talents are extremely like those of Irenæus, in his famous demonstration of the necessity of four gospels. Sometimes they are as sober as Cyprian, who rehearsed to his church in the morning the visions and dreams he had in the night, and who consulted little children in their extasies, when he had none of these himself.* Sometimes

* As extraordinary as this may seem, it will not surprise those who have read the confession, ascribed to him, and published among his works in the Benedictine edition of them. The great St. Cyprian, for so our divines, as well as yours, affect to call him, had been a rhetorician before his conversion, and was after it an admirer of his countryman, Tertullian, whom he called his master, and some portion of whose works he used to read every day, according to an anecdote mentioned by St. Jerom.* Now since he formed his style on this model, and on the taste of his age, we may well expect to find what is found in his writings, much hyperbole, much spiritual bombast, and all the flowers of false eloquence. We find them very eminently in that extraordinary piece, his confession. There he gives an account of his education, of his initiation into all the mysteries of Paganism, and of his admission into all the secrets of the blackest and most diabolical magic. Believe me, says the saint, I saw the devil himself; believe me, I embraced him, I conversed with him, and was esteemed one of those who held a principal rank about him. He adds, that the devil made him many compliments and promises, gave him a band of infernal spirits to command, and at the end of this first visit arose from his throne, and accompanied the young Jambres with a politeness that surprised all those who saw it. He describes his person, his dress, and the spirits that attended his court, in material forms, with which they were supplied by the steams of sacrifices. He describes afterwards the wonderful feats he performed, whilst he was a magician, and all the abominations of which he was guilty. But finding at last that the devil, and all the powers of hell had

* Lib. De Scrip. ecclesiast.

they are sagacious as Ambrose, who had visions and dreams too, and who had besides them the faculty of distinguishing the relics of saints and martyrs by certain emotions that they caused in him. Sometimes they are as cautious and exact, in their reports of miracles, as Austin was, who says on that important question, whether St. John died or not, "that the people of Ephesus, men of sense, and not light of belief, had assured him, that the saint

not been able to debauch Justina, a Christian virgin, for whom his friend Aglaidas had a strong inclination, and whom Cyprian himself seems to have liked very much, he renounced the devil and all his works. He set him even at defiance. You tremble, said the saint, at the name of Christ: the sign of his cross deprives you of all power: how would you stand his presence? Thus the devil was put to confusion. But Cyprian fell into despair, till his friend Eusebius comforted him, carried him to the bishop, and made him not only a Christian, but one of the greatest lights of the church.

Some divines would find, in all this, no reason to object to Cyprian's authority. On the contrary, they would exalt this confession, and the public shame which the penitent took to himself, as an illustrious proof of the sincerity of his conversion. Such divines might, perhaps, go farther, and show, by way of corollary, not only against the novations, that Christians who had apostatised might be received to repentance, but also that the most wicked of pagans might become a saint. They would not, however, be able to solve this dilemma. "Either Cyprian believed what he reported to be true, or he knew it to be false. If he believed it true, he was a madman. If he knew it to be false, he was a liar; and neither in one character, nor in the other, a fit pastor for the flock of Christ."

Other divines, both of your church, and of mine, are very unwilling to own that this confession is Cyprian's. They would gladly father it on some other person, no matter on whom. His writings do not only give, like those of the other fathers, a seeming authority to many of the doctrines that they teach; but he was in particular a zealous asserter of the dignity and power of bishops, and of the whole ecclesiastical order. The papists, indeed, have most use for this father: and his book *De Unitate Ecclesiæ* alone, nay, one single passage of it would suffice to make him a favorite in the church of Rome. The passage I mean is that wherein, after he has quoted the words of Christ to Peter,* though he acknowledges that all the apostles received the same powers, he adds,† "tamen ut unitatem manifestaret, unitatis ejusdem originem ab uno incipientem suâ authoritate disposuit——sed exordium ab unitate proficiscitur, et primatus Petro datur, ut una Christi ecclesia, et cathedra una monstretur." The reputation of such a witness in favor of papal primacy, and episcopal authority, in the middle of the third century, is to be supported at any rate; and by consequence this piece is not to be ascribed to him, if the priesthood can hinder it, by opposing the most improbable, to the most probable reasons.

We know nothing of the man till he became a Christian. St. Austin‡ indeed speaks of him, as if he had read his confession. "Mutatus est Cyprianus," says this saint of his countryman, "cujus hodie memoriam frequentamus—ipse scribit, ipse testatur cujus vitæ fuerit aliquando, quam nefariæ, quam impiæ, quam improbandæ, ac detestandæ." The author of the confession could almost alone deserve such epithets: and it is extremely probable that Pontius, a prudent deacon, and the ancient biographer of Cyprian, passed over in silence all that preceded his conversion, as if it had been unworthy to be mentioned,

* Mat. c. xvi. † John, c. xx. ‡ Serm. 311.

was buried in their town; but that he lay in his grave like one who sleeps in his bed, and that the earth which covered him rose and sunk, as the bed-clothes do over one who sleeps and breathes." To conclude, they were sometimes as sincere and honest as Jerom. The sincerity of this great doctor may be seen in this instance. He pretended that angels had scourged him severely for his attachment to profane authors; and to show that he had not dreamed it, he appealed to the marks that remained on his back.* His honesty may be seen in this. The fathers were apt to employ, like rhetors, false reasons and false authorities. Jerom commends the practice, avows it and gives rules for it. Nay he makes Peter and Paul guilty of it in their famous dispute, which gave occasion to another between him and the bishop of Hippo.

If we were obliged to search for the articles and grounds of faith, and for the measures of obedience, in this mystery of folly and iniquity; if we were to collect our Christianity from dark passages of Scripture, that admit often of no sense, and often of several, and that are rendered more uncertain and obscure by ecclesiastical traditions, and by such divines as have been mentioned, our case would be bad indeed. But such an absurdity cannot be in the order of an all-wise providence. God has dealt more graciously with his creatures. The kingdom of theology

but in truth that he might not be obliged to say any thing of this important confession. His modern biographer, a Benedictine monk, who published the edition of Cyprian's works, which Baluzius had begun, is not so easily embarrassed. He pretends that there were two Cyprians, the great St. Cyprian of Carthage, and a little St. Cyprian of Antioch, whose name is likewise preserved in ecclesiastical monuments. He insists on a poem, which Photius reports that the empress Eudocia wrote about a Cyprian and a Justina who suffered martyrdom in Nicomedia, and which contained many things that are imputed to the Cyprian we speak of, by St. Gregory of Nazianze in his eighteenth sermon, though they could not belong to him. On this foundation the monk assumes that St. Gregory confounded the Antiochian with the Carthaginian Cyprian, and did not know on whose festival he preached. Our learned Fell had objected that no one of this name is to be found among the bishops of Antioch: no wonder, says the learned Benedictine, for as there were two Cyprians, there were two Antiochs, the great Antioch so famous in history, and a little private Antioch concealed in Phœnicia, and scarce heard of in any public records. It seemed incredible to Fell that St. Gregory, who had been so well instructed in ecclesiastical affairs by his pious father, and who had been at Nicomedia and in the neighboring country, should know nothing of this Antiochian Cyprian, but apply the whole of this confession to the Carthaginian. It will avail little, I suppose, to affirm that Gregory was come newly to Constantinople, and that he preached without sufficient preparation and information: so that I may continue to believe, as I do believe, it more probable that these critics go about to deceive us, than that St. Gregory was deceived himself, and imposed on his auditory.

* Ep. ad Eustochium.

is the kingdom of darkness: and to enjoy the true light of the gospel, we must fly from it. To believe that Jesus was the Messiah is said by some to be the "unum necessarium" of faith; but to observe the laws of nature is certainly the "unum necessarium" of duty. About this summary of faith and duty there can be no very reasonable doubt. Scripture, tradition, and theology all conspire to establish them; although the two last endeavor to add to them, and to perplex them.

SECTION XX.

But it is time we should proceed to the last cause I assigned of the multiplication of sects, and the confusion of doctrines, which have rendered theology the corruption of religion and the bane of society, by the abuse which a distinct order of men has made of religion to acquire dominion over private conscience, and by that spiritual, a great share of temporal, dominion in every Christian state. With this I shall conclude all I have to say concerning authority in matters of religion, and shall plead the cause of it, successfully, I hope, against those infidels who charge it unjustly.

That religion is necessary to strengthen, and that it contributes to support government cannot be denied, I think, without contradicting reason and experience both. This some men have been extravagant enough to do directly: whilst others with whom we shall meddle here, have contradicted reason and experience, just as much, in a manner more likely to impose, and therefore more likely to do hurt, by propagating false conceptions of the Supreme Being, by perplexing the notions of religion, and by associating to it such as are really distinct from it. From hence all the evil consequences, that are imputed to religion, have flowed immediately: and it is necessary, therefore, in defence of it, to distinguish clearly between what is really religion, and what has been industriously, and is now habitually, confounded with it, and made to pass for it.

Civil obligations are imposed by the laws of man; religious obligations by those of God; and as the authority of the legislator is far greater in one case than in the other, so is the sanction of the law, eternal punishments in another life, instead of temporal pains and penalties in this. If it be said, that besides this difference, we are to consider how much religion has a farther influence than civil government can have, because the former reaches to the inward dispositions of the heart and mind, whilst the other goes no farther than to regulate outward conduct; I shall neither deny the proposition, nor admit all the use that is made of it: but I shall conclude from thence, how necessary it

is to the peace and welfare of mankind, that they be kept from jarring, which cannot be effectually prevented, unless the entire power of both remains in the same hands. As long as natural religion is alone concerned, this should not seem so difficult; but when revealed religions are established, the difficulty becomes almost insuperable. The principles and duties of natural religion arise from the nature of things, and are discovered by the reason of man, according to that order which the author of all nature, and the giver of all reason has established in the human system. From hence too would arise the institutions of civil government in a natural state; if the minds of legislators were not corrupted previously by superstition. In these cases, religion and civil government, arising from the same spring, their waters would be intermixed, they would run in one stream, and they might be easily confined to the same channel; if revelation did not introduce mysterious doctrines and rites, which it becomes soon a trade to teach and celebrate.

Neither nature, nor reason, could ever lead men to imagine two distinct and independent societies in the same society. This imagination was broached by ecclesiastical ambition; and when it was once broached, it was sure to be propagated by the self-interest of a whole order of men in every country, and by the superstition of all the rest. A respect for religion begat a respect for this order. The idea of religion came to be associated to that of church, or rather to be confounded with it, and church came to signify this order of men even exclusively. This church, this religious society, grew up in some countries, to be the tyrant, in others to be the rival of the state on the authority of pretended revelations among the heathens: and it is a melancholy truth, that the same monstrous growth has been seen and felt, on the pretended authority of real revelations among Christians. Such is the knavery and such the folly of mankind, that no example, ancient nor modern, Pagan nor Christian, can be produced of such an order of men once established that has not aimed at acquiring from their institution, and that has not acquired, sooner or later, immoderate wealth and exorbitant power.

Few men are so little acquainted with the history of the Christian world as not to know, that the wealth of this church is equal, at least in many countries, to that of the Egyptian church; that the influence of the ancient could not be greater than that of the modern magi over all ranks of men; and that the bishop of Rome has exercised, even over kings in many countries, a power which he claimed, in all, of the same nature with that of the Ethiopian church over kings of one country.

A religious society, by which is meant, on this occasion, a clergy, is, or is not the creature of the state. If the first, it

follows, that this order, no more than others, which the state has instituted for the maintenance of good government, can assume any rights, or exercise any powers, except such as the state has thought fit to attribute to it; and that the state may, and ought to keep a constant control over it, not only to prevent usurpations and abuses, but to direct the public and private influence of the clergy in a strict conformity to the letter and spirit of that constitution, the servants of which, in a much truer sense they are, than what they affect sometimes to call themselve, the ambassadors of God to other men. If the last is said, if it is asserted, that the church is in any sort independent on the state, there arises from this pretension the greatest absurdity imaginable, that I mean of *imperium in imperio:* an empire of divine in an empire of human institution. It is in truth so expressly contained in the very terms of the assertion, that none of the tedious sophistical reasonings, which have been employed for the purpose, can evade or disguise it.

One of these I will mention, because it has a certain air of plausibility, that imposes on many, and because, if it cannot stand a short and fair examination, as I think it cannot, the whole edifice of ecclesiastical independence and grandeur falls to the ground. It has been said then, that religious and civil societies are widely distinguished by the distinct ends of their institutions, which imply necessarily distinct powers and a mutual independence; that the end of one is the salvation of souls, and that of the other the security of temporal interests; that the state punishes overt acts, and can punish nothing else, because it can have cognizance of nothing that passes in the mind and does not break out into criminal actions; but that the church employing her influence to temper the passions, to regulate the inward dispositions, and to prevent sins, as well as crimes, is that tribunal at which even intentions are to be tried, and sins, that do not ripen into crimes, nor immediately affect civil society, are to be punished.

Now in answer to all this we may deny, with truth and reason on our side, that the avowed ends of religious, and the real ends of civil societies, are so distinct as to require distinct powers, and a mutual independence. The salvation of souls is not the immediate end of civil government: and I wish it was not rather the pretence than the end of ecclesiastical policy. But if to abstain from evil, and to do good works, be means of salvation, the means of salvation are objects of civil government. It is the duty of princes and magistrates to promote a strict observation of the law of nature, of private and public morality, and to make those who live in subjection to them good men, in order to make them good citizens. For this purpose, the ba-

lance and the sword are put into their hands, that they may measure out punishment to every one who injures the community, or does wrong to his neighbor; and a rigorous punishment of crimes, especially if it be accompanied with rewards and encouragements to virtue, for both are entrusted to the same men, is the surest way, not only to reform the outward behaviour, but to create a habitual inward disposition to the practice of religion.

A clergy might co-operate with the civil magistrates very usefully no doubt, by exhortations and reproofs, whereof they are seldom sparing, and much more by example, which can alone give efficacy to the former, and which is not, however, very frequently employed. This they might do as assistants to the civil magistrate, in concert with him, and in subordination to him. To what purpose, therefore, do they claim and affect independence on him? Greater power never did, nor can enable them to do greater good. On the contrary, it always has, and always must divert them from the proper business of their profession, create scandalous strifes with the civil power, and embarrass the whole order of government. Would they erect a tribunal to punish intentions? The very pretence is impertinent. Would they erect it to punish, where no injury is offered, nor wrong done? The design is unjust and arbitrary. The ideas of crime are determinate and fixed. The magistrate can not alter them. The ideas of sins are more confused and vague; and we know by long and general experience how they vary in the minds, or at least in the writings of casuists. Would they erect such a tribunal to try the orthodoxy of men's faith? Such a one is erected, in some countries, under the name of the inquisition, and is justly detested in all. A tribunal, with all the powers of the inquisition, may extirpate heresy, or rather propagate hypocrisy, by the most abominable species of tyranny. A tribunal of this sort, that has powers less coercive, may teaze, and vex and irritate mankind. It may multiply sects, render them more obstinate by persecution, and bring all those evils on the world which atheists object to religion: but the former can never procure a real, nor the latter even an apparent uniformity. To what end and purpose then can spiritual courts, and coercive powers attributed to the clergy, serve, unless it be to make them judges and parties in their own case, when matters of interest are concerned?

SECTION XXI.

I insist on this point the more, not only because it leads directly to what I shall have occasion to say in the latter part of this essay, but because I would take off the mask of ecclesiastical ambition, which even some of our own divines put on. Those of your church have laid it aside long ago, and contend openly for ecclesiastical tyranny. The principal difference among them seems to be, whether this tyranny shall be that of a monarchy, or of an aristocracy. Honest Laud went as far, at least as the most moderate of yours, and was frank enough to own his principles and aim. The several revolutions that have happened in our church and state have rendered the first too unpopular, to be directly avowed, and the latter too visibly impracticable, to be entertained. The bait, however, is tempting, and therefore even they nibble at it, who fear the hook. What they are not suffered to attempt in practice, they maintain in speculation: they insinuate principles, which may serve to re-establish ecclesiastical power and independence on the state in some more happy conjuncture; and they do all this safely, whilst seeming modifications, and ambiguous expressions hinder most men fron discerning the consequences of what they advance, and some even from knowing again in their writings the same doctrines that they had condemned in the writings of others.

Among all the fallacies which have been employed by churchmen, who have thought it necessary to soften the absurdity, and to anticipate objections, one of the most absurd has been, advanced, though not invented, by a paradoxical acquaintance of yours; and it is to maintain the independence of the church, and to suppose, at the same time, a sort of original contract between the church and the state, the terms of which every whimsical writer, even this scribbler, adjusts as he pleases. They who contend for absolute monarchy in the state endeavor to explode the notion of an original contract between the prince and the people, because the terms of it are easy to be ascertained. They know, those of them at least who are not as mad as Filmer know, that all the rights and powers which a prince can have must be derived originally from the people. They know, therefore, that the terms of such a contract, generally made, and always implied, may be sufficiently ascertained by reason, by law, and by custom, notwithstanding any previous and divine right, which it may be supposed, that princes have to govern. They know too, that the whole body of the people, and no particular order of men, are to judge of the observation of this

contract. But they who contend for the independence of the church on the state are ready to assume such a contract, because the pretence may serve to delude the state, in some countries, and can never embarrass the church in any. By admitting it, the state acknowledges an original independence in the church, derived from a greater authority than her own: and the supposed terms of union may be construed to be rather concessions of the religious society to the civil, for the sake of order and peace, than grants of the civil to the religious society. Thus religion and the church are set on the same foot; no human authority can alter one, but must receive it in the terms in which it has been revealed; and so may a good casuist prove, on this hypothesis, that no human authority can measure out any conditions of establishment to the other. Thus the state becomes nothing better than a co-ordinate, but inferior power.

The stupid fellow, who advanced this paradox in English, did not see how ill the parts of it hang together; nor that if ecclesiastical government was, by divine appointment, independent of civil, no such contract, as he supposes, could be made. The religious society, notwithstanding their known moderation, could not have departed from that independence and superiority over the civil power which God had given them. But the truth is, they were glad to get an establishment in the empire at any rate: and when a fortunate conjuncture had made one emperor think, that they might be of use to him, it happened, as it often has happened, that the auxiliaries usurped on him, or his successors at least, on the prerogatives of the crown, and on the liberties of the people. In short, if there had been any alliance between the church and the state on this occasion, it must have been such an alliance as never was heard of before nor since. It must have been an alliance without any treaty, for there certainly was none: and all the advantages, which the religious society acquired afterwards over the civil were mere usurpations; for usurpations by fraud are as really such, as usurpations by force, and these were carried as far as legislative authority.

The church advocates beyond the Alps may be a little more impudent, but they are much more consistent than some on this side. That voluminous compilation of decrees of councils and of popes, of resolutions of fathers, of apostolical constitutions, and of other ecclesiastical authorities, composes a body of law, according to them, which the church had a right to enact without the concurrence of the state, and which is, however, obligatory on the state, and on every member of the state, as far as they are concerned in it. This, I say, is impudent; but it is consistent with the notion of a religious society of divine institution, and therefore independent, and may be easily defended

on that principle. But where we shall look for the conditions of that original contract, which was made between the religious and the civil society, I know not; unless we suppose them written on the back of Constantine's grant to Sylvester, and preserved in that grand repertory of forgeries, the records of the Roman church. We shall not find them in the canon law. The French, as good papists as they are, admit this in part only; and the quarrel between Philip le Bel and Boniface the Eighth may be said to subsist even now. We, who have shook off the Roman yoke entirely, admit still less of this ecclesiastical code; for we reject every thing in it that is not conformable to the law of the state, and to the doctrines of the church, which this law has established.

This imaginary contract, in short, whether well or ill made, never existed at any time, nor in any country; though to have been real, and really authorised, it should have been the same, at all times and in all countries, where Christianity was propagated. Political societies make, and alter, and break their alliances, as the varying reason of stage suggests. Different orders of civil government, in the same society, change, and with them the whole constitution of such governments, as reason or passion, the interests or dispositions of men determine them. But a religion given by God is in its nature invariable; and therefore, if a religious society, with certain privileges, immunities and prerogatives, be necessary to preserve it so, the order and constitution of such a society must be invariable, too. The church must be established by the same divine authority as the religion, and be by consequence independent on the state. But nothing of this kind has been. Christ's kingdom was not of this world. He sent out his apostles to teach and to baptise, and the utmost power he gave them, besides that of working miracles to convince and to convert, was to shake off the dust of their feet, and to protest against the infidelity of those, who refused to receive them and the gospel they published. The apostles ordained others to accompany and to succeed them in the same office, the office of teaching and baptising. The apostles could give no more power than they received; and no argument of right can be drawn from any thing that passed, nor from any thing that these men did, for the maintenance of their sect, whilst Christianity was a sect. As little argument of right, or of independence, can be drawn from the impolitic indulgence of civil governments, that embracing the religion admitted the teachers of it into a legal establishment, with all the extraordinary powers they had enjoyed, whilst they were leaders and heads of a sect. I call it indulgence, because the religious society had no original right to any such powers; because the sect could not prescribe in such

cases to the state; and because they were not admitted by any treaty, but by the good will and sole authority of the civil government. I call this indulgence impolitic, because it encouraged ecclesiastical ambition, laid the foundation of all the usurpations of the church on the state, destroyed the effect of religion by theology, and made even Christianity a grievance, as will be shown immediately.

SECTION XXII.

Christianity had not been established many centuries in the West, before a claim to universal property was set on foot in favor of the faithful, that is of Christians; nor before the Bishop of Rome claimed universal empire, not only over the religious, but over all civil societies. St. Austin shall vouch for what I advance here on the first head, and what I say on the second has public notoriety for its voucher. The saint in a letter to Macedonius,* takes notice of a passage in the proverbs of Solomon,† which runs to this effect in the Septuagint version:—"To the faithful man belongs a whole world of riches; to the infidel or unfaithful, not even a farthing."‡ What sense the passage may receive, I inquire not: but this is the comment of St. Austin upon it. "We have a property in that which we possess of right; we possess of right what we possess justly; we possess justly what we possess well; whatever is ill possessed, therefore, belongs to another; but he possesses a thing ill, who makes an ill use of it." On this admirable foundation, the good bishop establishes the right of such saints as himself, "fideles et pii quorum jure sunt omnia," to the property of the whole world. The right is in them, though the iniquity of the unrighteous possessors be tolerated. "Toleratur iniquitas malè habentium, et quædam inter eos jura constituuntur quæ appellantur civilia." This, however, he is willing to connive at for the sake of present expediency, instead of insisting on an immediate cession of all this wealth, or on an actual repeal of all the laws of civil government. His words are so gracious, that they deserve to be quoted. "Sed tamen etiam hic non intercedimus, ut secundum mores legesque terrenas non restintuantur aliena," &c. I believe this great doctor of the church appears to you, as he does to me, a casuist fit for Venner and the tribe of the fifth monarchy: and I cannot persuade myself that he was so inconsistent as to refuse any estates, or other donations, that were offered to the church,

* Ep. 54, ed. Basil. † Prov. xvii, 6.
‡ Fidelis hominis totus mundus divitiarum est, infidelis autem nec obolus.

or to restore any that had been given, though it has been asserted, I remember not on what authority, that he did so.

Thus early, and thus violently, did a spirit of avarice possess the religious society: and we may easily conceive what a spirit of stupid bigotry and implicit resignation possessed the laity at the same time, when a little bishop of Hippo durst advance such doctrines as I have quoted to such a man as Macedonius. He might be encouraged to make the claim by the practice of the first Christians; for among them, all things were in common; the rich sold their possessions, and laid the whole price at the feet of the apostles. I say the whole price, and I add, that it was strictly exacted, as we may assure ourselves from the example of Ananias and his wife Saphira.* They might have kept their estate or the whole price they had sold it for. But when they brought it, in imitation of the zeal of other Christians, to the apostolical chamber or treasury, it became a fraud to keep back any part of it. Less than the whole would not satisfy the church: and St. Peter accuses them accordingly of fraud, and of lying to the Holy Ghost; because they had given no more than they could spare, and had owned no more than they had given. The punishment followed instantly: they were both struck dead. It appears that great collections were made, and every church had a common purse. By these means they supported their poor: and every man who embraced Christianity, being sure not to want bread, the gospel was more effectually propagated, and great numbers of the lowest rank of people were brought into the pale. Another pious use of ecclesiastical wealth was to maintain the fathers and ministers of the word. We see, by St. Paul's epistles, that they were so maintained in their several missions, and this apostle, in writing to the Corinthians, when he distinguishes himself from others, and values himself above them on many accounts, insists particularly on this, that he had preached gratis, and taken nothing from them. He had a trade, and he maintained himself by it; for which reason Erasmus calls him, as I remember, "coriarius pontifex," the leather dressing pontiff.

It was not zeal alone that brought an immense wealth to the church even in the first centuries. An opinion that the end of the world was near, made the rich more indifferent to riches, that they were not to enjoy long, or that were not to remain long in their families. This opinion the clergy promoted: and the laity was so silly as not to see that if it was not worth their while to keep their estates, it was not worth the while of churchmen to be so solicitous to acquire them. The end of the world seemed to be fixed at the distance of about two hundred years,

* Acts, c. v.

in the beginning of the fourth century, according to Lactantius,* who wrote at that time: and yet this motive had such effect, in conjunction with a multitude of other artifices employed by the religious society to the same purpose, that in this very century a law to restrain ecclesiastics from obtaining donations and wills in their favor was become necessary. Not only Valentinian and Gratian, but even Theodosius, made edicts for this purpose; and the practice of inveigling weak people, devout women particularly, to defraud their right heirs, and to give their estates to the church, was so public, so frequent, and so infamous, that the church, who had permission to hold these estates, thought it prudent to submit to some appearance of restraint in acquiring them. I say appearance of restraint, because we may conclude that means were found of evading this very restraint, from the experience of our own age; and because it is fair to conclude that none were neglected of heaping up wealth in those ages, when bishops themselves were the greatest usurers. This wealth was such that it proved a principal cause of the persecutions of the church, as Father Paul observes,† from the reign of Commodus: and we know that Decius, who was a great and a good prince, as princes went in those days, and as they go in ours, attempted nothing more at first, than many Christian princes have executed. He attempted to seize the treasure of the church at Rome. Lawrence, a deacon of that church, broke his measures. He put Lawrence to death, and the seventh persecution began on that occasion; for which his memory has been persecuted by Christian writers; as that of Charles Martel has been by the Monks, who sent him to hell for taking some of the wealth of the church, to defend both the church and the state against the Saracens.

Abundance of matter offers itself to us on this head. But the immense wealth of the clergy, their insatiable thirst after it, the usurpations and other scandalous methods by which they acquired it, and the no less scandalous use they made of it, are now so well known, that it would be loss of time to enter into any great detail on the subject. A general observation or two will be sufficient for our purpose. Bishops found pretences and means of taking to their own use the revenues that had been appropriated to the poor, the churches and the inferior clergy, as well as to them; and left the charge of maintaining all these on the laity, who had provided for them once already. The laity were so simple as to take the charge upon them, instead of

* Omnis expectatio non amplius quam ducentorum videtur annorum.—Instit. l. 7, c. 25.

† Hist. of Benef.

obliging these lords of the religious society to keep to the original appropriation. Hence arose the divine right of tithes, and a multitude of other exactions. But if the laity thought that their pockets were to be picked no more, they were soon undeceived. The secular clergy, living no longer in communities, gave more public scandal, and became less fit to excite the charity of the faithful. A new clergy, therefore, arose: and monks and monasteries began about the year five hundred. The former were not all priests, indeed, at first. But the latter were retreats of men who obliged themselves to live in these convents, that I may speak with exact propriety, a cenobitic life under the conduct of the priests, and in all the supposed regularity and austerity of the first Christians. These professions and engagements struck the imaginations, and roused the zeal of the faithful; and convents were endowed with as much profusion as if nothing had been yet done for the church. These orders degenerated apace; and as fast as they did so new orders were founded, and endowed, under the same pretence. Nothing was taken from those who had forfeited the conditions of the grants made to them, and much was given to those who took new engagements, and kept them as ill. Thus ecclesiastical policy contrived to enrich the church, even by the corruption of the clergy, and to carry these abuses forward, in an uniform gradation, and with an equal pace.

The claim St. Austin made to the riches of the whole world, as belonging of right to the elect, had not been made, I suppose, before his time; though Irenæus had justified the robbery of the Egyptians by the Israelites, on principles much the same. This claim too was neither publicly asserted by himself, nor by his cotemporaries, nor by his successors, nor at any time by the church in form; the reason of which was, no doubt, that they saw how needless and imprudent it would be to give such an alarm to all mankind, when they might go on to plunder particular countries and families without resistance, though sometimes against law, and always with very great effect. This the religious society did, before it had any pretence of alliance with the civil, or any establishment in the Roman empire; and it is astonishing to consider, though we meet with the examples and proofs almost in every page of history ecclesiastical and civil, how an order of men, instituted to teach a religion of so much purity, sanctity, and detachments from all worldly interests, could convert this very institution into a sordid trade, and make other men believe that the best of good works was to enrich this order, and the greatest of sins to take any thing from it. This continued to be the case, however, near fifteen centuries, without any considerable interruption. During so long a course of time, the princi-

ples of the gospel were so forgotten, and so perverted, that salvation was a merchandise bought and sold in every ecclesiastical shop, in that of Rome above all. This shop had so much custom, that a pope of the fourteenth century, John the twenty-second, the inventor of annates and many other exactions, left behind him, by Villani's account, which father Paul quotes in his history of benefices, eighteen millions in specie, and seven millions in plate and ingots. An immense sum in any age, especially in that when the West Indies had not been yet discovered.

The abuse grew to be most exorbitant in the most devout ages of the church, that is, in the ages of greatest ignorance and superstition; for then the clergy had persuaded men, and the more corrupt they were, the more easily they were persuaded, that all sorts of crimes might be committed safely by those who submitted to the slight penances and pecuniary mulcts which the church imposed, either arbitrarily, or according to a book of rates. When, I say, that crimes might be committed safely on these terms, I mean safely from divine vengeance; for the man whom the church pretended to screen from this would have been condemned at any human tribunal, and was so, I doubt not, often to the gallows or the rack. Thus the great sanction of revealed religion was taken away by artificial theology and ecclesiastical fraud; and a great part of the objections that infidels urge against it receive a color from the doctrine and practice of that religious society, whose independence and divine institution are pleaded for so strenuously.

The religious society was so far from being by any right independent on the civil, or from treating with it in form, and being incorporated with it on specific terms of alliance, when Christianity became in a fortunate conjuncture the established religion of the empire, that this society grew into power; and into riches, as it has been said already, by degrees, by indulgence and concessions on one hand, by art and management on the other. Claims precede acquisitions in the natural and ordinary course of things. But in this case acquisition preceded claims. The church, indeed, made a claim to power, when she was first established; but it was to spiritual power. Nothing else was avowed; nothing else was suspected. The civil society did not see that spiritual power was power over opinion, and that this was power over conscience, or seeing it did not enough consider how this power might extend and increase, how it might rival and subdue their own. But as soon as the church had drawn a great part of the affairs of civil government into her own tribunal, under the notion of spirituals, or of things appertaining to spirituals; as soon as she had acquired a prescriptive right of employing the civil power in spiritual

quarrels, and the spiritual power in civil, she claimed a sovereign and universal authority, seized the two swords into her hands, and sharpened the edge of both.

SECTION XXIII.

The good effects of maintaining, and the bad effects of neglecting, religion, had been extremely visible, in the whole course of the Roman government. Numa, the second founder of Rome, contributed more to the prosperity and grandeur of that empire, than the first founder of it, Romulus, and all the warrior kings who succeeded him; for Numa established a religion, directed it, as others, both kings and consuls, did after his example, to the support of civil government, and made it the principle of all the glorious expectations that were raised in the minds of that people. This religion was very absurd, and yet by keeping up an awe of superior powers, and the belief of a Providence that ordered the course of events, it produced all the marvellous effects, which Machiavel, and writers more able to judge of them and of their causes than he was, Polybius, Cicero, Plutarch, and others ascribe to it. The inward peace of that government was often broken by seditions: Rome was in distress at home whilst she triumphed abroad, and at last the dissolution of the commonwealth followed a long and bloody series of civil war. But the neglect of religion, not religion, was a principal cause of these evils. Religion decayed, and the state decayed with her. She might have preserved it; but even in her decay, she gave it no wounds, nor festered like a poison in any.

This example, many others, and the reason of things were sufficient to make such a man as Constantine see the necessity of reviving and reforming the ancient religion of Rome, or of establishing a new one; in short, of taking in the assistance of some religion or other, to pursue more effectually the great designs of his ambition. His rivals in the empire were pagans: and paganism did more than begin to be no longer a proper band of society. The superstitious opinions and practices of it were as much in vogue in his time, as they had been in the best ages of Rome, but they were not directed, as they had been in those ages, to the support of civil government. The virtue of old Rome, and the spirit of her religion, fainted, when her liberty expired: and they were wholly extinguished in the time of Constantine, by a long course of tyrannical dominion seldom interrupted, by the venality of the senate now and long before inured to slavery, by the ferocity of the armies, by the licen-

tiousness of the provinces, and by that independence on the authority, as well as disregard to the majesty, of the empire which prevailed in both.

On the other hand, Christianity, born, if I may say so, in a desert, and educated in a little province of the empire, had spread through the whole in the course of three centuries. The progress of it was not so immense, perhaps, as Tertullian represents it in his hyperbolical style. But it was great, and Christians under one denomination or another were numerous in every part of the East and West. Paganism was worn out in one sense, in theory, if not in practice; the impostures of it were detected; the absurd doctrines and rites were exposed to ridicule. The priests could not defend it, and the philosophers explained it away. It lay exposed like an unfortified country, and, as the empire did soon afterwards, to every incursion. Christianity was fresh and vigorous. The apparent sanctity of those who professed this religion, the courage of those who died for it, and the zeal of those philosophers and rhetors who were converted to it and wrote for it, were more than sufficient to defeat the calumny raised against it. They were more than sufficient, I mean, to defeat it among all such as finding it to be calumny in some instances, looked no farther, but deemed it to be the same in all. Among others, and in general, the very name of Christian continued to be odious long. A spirit of enthusiasm prompted many on one side to revile and disturb the rites of an established religion, to provoke the heathen, to rejoice in sufferings, and to court martyrdom. A spirit of party, inflamed by resentment, transported the other side to exercise the greatest cruelties, by sudden popular emotions, as well as by regular authorised persecutions. But as soon as the Christian faith and worship, by being tolerated first, and legally established soon afterwards, became better known, the grossest calumnies, that had been propagated against them, began to die away even among the vulgar. These calumnies had been such as could not bear examination; more gross, if that be possible, than any of those which Christians have propagated against the heathens, the Jews, the Mahometans, or even against one another in their several sects. One may easily conceive, that the detection of these turned to the advantage of Christianity, and that patience under this kind of persecution, as well as fortitude and perseverance under another, did honor to the professors of this religion, and prepared the way to the establishment of it.

There is another circumstance of the same tendency, which deserves to be mentioned. Whilst the Christians were confounded with the Jews, or passed for a sect of that religion, they shared the hatred and contempt which that nation had contract-

ed. But they distinguished themselves soon, in a manner that took off all prejudice of this kind from them, and showed the wisdom and policy of St. Paul's conduct in declaring himself the apostle of the Gentiles, to whom the kingdom of Christ was opened, and who were heirs of the promises as well as the Jews. On this popular principle Christianity was propagated: and one of the first edicts, that Constantine published, in favor of Christianity, was a very severe one against Jews, who should insult Christians, and Christians who should turn to Judaism. The Jews were no longer a chosen people: their nation was rejected; and all the nations of the earth were invited to partake of the same privileges, the same graces, and the same salvation. Thus the Christian religion was made the religion of mankind, by the first principles of it, even whilst it was a sect: and therefore, Constantine might think very reasonably, that to embrace and establish it would be an effectual means of uniting mankind under his government. He might think this establishment the more easy to be made by his authority, because the mysteries of Christianity were more sublime and more refined, and therefore more proper objects of veneration, than those of paganism; though many of them had been borrowed from it, and because the external worship of the new religion might be rendered, if that should be thought necessary, as pompous, and as fit to draw the attention of the people, as that of the old, by adopting some of the ceremonies and usages of the old; which adoption the Christian church had already begun to put in practice.

All this was done: and no man, who considers what influence not princes only, but private men raised to the head of parties, have had in the change of religions, will think it was hard for Constantine to do it when he had persuaded his troops, that they beat Maxentius under the ensign of the cross, and when he disputed the empire with Licinius, the declared enemy of the cross afterwards. Christianity became the established religion of the empire, and heathenism, in its turn, a persecuted sect, banished from the cities by Constantine and his successors, and forced to hide its head in villages and hamlets. Whilst gentilism, or the religion of nations, was the established religion, Christianity maintained itself in most of the cities of the empire. But as soon as this religion had taken possession of the court and the cities, the other became so generally that of peasants only, that the appellation of Paganism did, probably enough, take its rise from thence.

This great revolution was effected in part by the circumstances I have mentioned, and by others that favored the growth of Christianity. The imperial authority did the rest, but did it ill, so ill, that the chief of those political views, which Constantine

had in making this establishment, were defeated by it, and the admission of a religious society into the state, in the manner in which he admitted it, was the cause of all the ecclesiastical and theological evils that have followed from his time to ours, and that are so falsely imputed to religion itself. We may be assured, that the society co-operated with the court to bring about a revolution so much to their advantage, and thought themselves happy enough to be dependent, not independent, on the emperor; his instruments, not his allies; whatever appearances he might give or suffer them to assume in those solemn ecclesiastical farces, wherein he condescended to act, in some respects, a second part. This supposition is easily reconciled to history: and if it was less so, history would be only the more inconsistent. We shonld never persuade ourselves that such a man, as it represents Constantine to have been, was a bigot, as much as Helena, or reverenced priests as much as she did relics. He was not a bigot though the church has made him a saint; nor a bubble of ecclesiastical policy, though it seems to me that he was so of his own. But whilst he recalled to his mind, as he did most probably, the great service religion was of to ancient Rome, he seemed to forget that, when that religion flourished, and was of so much service to the state, it was under the immediate inspection of the state. There was no council, but the senate, to define doctrines, nor to regulate discipline: and men were at the head of religious, because they were at the head of civil administration, instead of being at the head of the latter, because they were at the head of the former.

We cannot doubt, that the political views of Constantine, in the establishment of Christianity, were to attach the subjects of the empire more firmly to himself and his successors, and the several nations that composed it, to one another, by the bonds of a religion common to all of them; to soften the ferocity of the armies; to reform the licentiousness of the provinces; and by infusing a spirit of moderation and submission to government, to extinguish those principles of avarice and ambition, of injustice and violence, by which so many factions were formed, and the peace of the empire was so often and so fatally broken. Now no religion was ever so well proportioned, nor so well directed, as that of Christianity seemed to be to all these purposes. It had, indeed, no tendency to inspire that love of the country, nor that zeal for the glory and grandeur of it, which glowed in the breast of every Roman citizen almost, whilst the commonwealth was in splendor. But it recommended what Constantine liked better, benevolence, patience, humility, and all the softer virtues, subjection to the civil powers as to the ordinances of God, and passive obedience and non-resistance. These it recommended:

and these it is said the Christians had practised, not only whilst they lay under the ordinary hardships imposed upon them, but under the extraordinary severity of ten persecutions, wherein ecclesiastical writers boast, how truly may be doubted, that thirty bishops of the church of Rome alone were martyrised.*

* Ecclesiastical, like all other party writers, deserve little credit when they relate facts, or draw characters, which may seem to reflect honor on those of their own side, and to render their adversaries odious. That Christians were sometimes persecuted, is a point out of dispute. But whether these persecutions were so frequent, so severe, and so unprovoked, as they stand represented, is a point very disputable. If some of the emperors, and those not of the worst, used the Christians ill; others, and those not of the best, showed them favor. Origen, who was the son of a martyr, and who aspired to be such himself, asserts,* I think, that they who suffered for their religion, were few. The authority is good, and the matter of fact probable. Whoever considers the temper and character of sects, of religious sects especially, and of the primitive Christians among others, will think it probable, that whenever they were punished by the heathen magistrates, they were ready to impute their punishment to their Christianity, and to complain of persecution. Their clergy were, under pretence of religion, a very lawless tribe, and paid little regard, on many occasions, to the government whose subjects they were. They usurped the part of civil judges, they assumed the power of making wills, they took possession by fraud, or violence, of the estates of others; and not content to break the laws in such instances as these, which may be called private, they broke them in the most public manner, and instigated others to break them by popular insurrections against the legal authority of magistrates, and by tumults, and riots, in which they insulted not only the established religion of the empire, but even their own religion, as it was practised by those who differed from them in any points of doctrine or discipline. Zeal, worked up to enthusiasm, pushed them to these excesses, and we may well believe, that they who were punished for them were decorated with the title of martyrs, and made the heroes of pious romances by the zeal of others. The list of martyrs consisted, I believe, of those who suffered for breaking the peace, and for insulting one religion, as much as of those who suffered for professing quietly another, nay more: and thus it might be immeasurably lengthened. Thus too the assertion of Origen may be reconciled easily to the opinion, that there was an innumerable army of martyrs in the primitive church. We find passages in the letters of Julian, which confirm very much what is here supposed. In that which he writes to the Alexandrians, it appears, that he did not banish Athanasius because he was a bishop, but on account of his intriguing spirit, and the disturbances he raised. Julian gives the Christians leave to choose any other bishop, who might instruct them as well as Athanasius; and adds, that if they desired to have him at Alexandria for any other reason, that was the reason for which he was banished. This emperor, on whose testimony, though he was an apostate, a reasonable man, who considered the characters of both, would rely much sooner, than he would rely on that of such a turbulent, intriguing, foul-mouthed priest as Cyril: this emperor, I say, complains loudly of the Christian flocks for persecuting one another, and for insulting the established church, at the instigation of their pastors. When he promises, therefore, to force none to worship at his altars, and commands the heathens not to injure nor affront

* Lib. 3, Contra Cels.

Such doctrines and such examples might well encourage Constantine to think, that nothing could contribute more, than the establishment of Christianity in the empire, to the establishment of hereditary imperial dignity in his family, and to universal peace and tranquillity. He was confirmed in this expectation, no doubt, by the professions and adultations of Sylvester, and of the whole tribe of ecclesiastics; whether the tale of his conversion by this Pope has any more truth in it, than that of his famous grant to the church of Rome, or not. But in order to discern the better how these professions were kept, and what the effects have been of this ecclesiastical establishment, we must descend into some few particulars, at least, concerning it, from Constantine to Charles the Great, and from Charles the Great down to our own age. The usurpations of the religious on the civil society, the abuse of theology, and the abominable consequences of this abuse, were in part alike, and in part different, and differently carried on with regard to power especially, in these two periods, which for that reason, it is good to distinguish.

SECTION XXIV.

These usurpations might have been wholly prevented: and although the abuse of theology, which was grown up to a great height, could not be so, yet might the growth of it have been checked, and the tragical effects of it have been prevented, if Constantine had reduced, and his successors had kept the clergy within proper bounds, instead of giving such a loose to avarice and ambition, to enthusiasm and contentious subtilty, as made them the plagues and scourges of the world. The emperors were sovereign pontiffs. As such, either with this title, or without it, they should have kept the whole power over ecclesiastical as well as civil affairs in their own hands, and have applied the former to preserve order and discipline, to prevent abuse and corruption in the Christian, as it had been their prerogative and their duty to apply it in the heathen church. This was natural; this was reasonable. But nothing could be more unnatural, nor more unreasonable, than to divest themselves of any part of the imperial power, in favor of this order.

It seems too, that there could be no need of doing so. That the bishops gave the emperors leave to retain the title of sovereign pontiffs, is one of those idle tales which Baronius in-

any of them, he commands them likewise to live in peace with the heathens and with one another, and threatens to punish them, not for their religion, but for sedition, and the violation of the civil laws.

vented. But that no objection appears to have been made to it by the Christians, is true; and if there was no objection made for holding a pagan pontificate, there would have been certainly none for assuming that office in the Christian church. I will not say, that the emperors might have performed pontifical functions; though I see no absurdity in the proposition, nor am able to conceive why they should not have exacted to be ordained priests and primates of the whole Christian church from the first, if that form had been thought necessary, as they have submitted to be crowned emperors, since that time, by the bishops. But this I will say, and no divine of our church will dare to contradict me, that they might have made themselves heads of the church, defenders of the faith, and, next under God and his Son Christ Jesus, supreme moderators and governors in all matters, ecclesiastical and civil, without being priests. From whence should any opposition to Constantine or his successors have arisen, if he or they had thought fit to execute the functions of Christian pontiffs, when the state of religion in the empire permitted them to do so; since they kept the title, wore the robe, and executed some of the powers, at least, of supreme pontiffs in the pagan church? Should it have come from the bishops? But the bishops were mean and generally ignorant men, exercised in the lowest and least honorable professions, elected by party and faction, by intrigue and violence, and ready to comply with any mode that was prevalent, according to the character given of them nearly about this time, by St. Gregory of Nazianze. We may assure ourselves the good men would have sounded high the honor which Constantine did the church, and his zeal for our Holy religion, before they had got the strength they got afterwards, for want of this very precaution. Then, indeed, such an inequality of privileges and advantages was established between the clergy and the laity in many respects, and in this particularly, that the former were deemed capable of exercising all the powers, and of enjoying all the dignities and profits of civil magistracies, whilst the latter were excluded from all ecclesiastical power, dignity, and profit. In a word, we may believe that this step would have been popular among the whole body of Christians, when their religion was first established. Nothing would have appeared more just than that an emperor, by whose favor alone they became members of an established church, from being members of a sect, seldom tolerated, often persecuted, and always afflicted, should suffer no diminution of his imperial prerogative in this great change.

Constantine neglected to take this advantage, in the extent in which he might have asserted his right to it. He took, indeed,

some airs of supremacy on certain occasions, and so did his successors. They presided in the synods they convened, they controlled the proceedings of these assemblies, and they confirmed their decrees in matters of doctrine as well as discipline; for without this confirmation these decrees would have had little effect. By these means the emperors secured their prerogative, on which ecclesiastical synods would not have failed to encroach more than they did, or at least faster, in cases of appeals, of exemptions from secular jurisdiction, or from the common burden of taxes, and in many other cases. But the successors of Constantine laying aside even the title of sovereign pontiffs in little more than half a century, if Gratian did lay it aside, and neither Constantine nor they having preserved a steady exercise of the pontifical power over ecclesiastical affairs and ecclesiastical persons in the Christian church, the exercise of it devolved of course on the bishops. A constant exercise gave the pretence, and settled the opinion of a sole right in them, who could have none independently on the emperors, even in ordinary cases, to many extraordinary powers, whilst an occasional exercise of powers that belonged of right to these princes came to be looked upon in them as usurpation and sacrilege. Their chaplains became their masters: and one of these pretends to be so even at this time. How Constantine was the bubble of his own policy, as I have presumed to say that he was, as many great men have been, and as Charlemagne was in much the same respect four hundred years after him, may be shown, I think, on good grounds of probability, without supposing him to have been misled by a bigot respect for the church, which many of those who succeeded him were. It may be shown, I think, even by ecclesiastical history, for this, like other histories, shows very often more than it owns, even what it denies: and the sagacity of the reader gives him often a right of saying to the historian "ex ore tuo condemnaberis."

Thus it seems to me, that the great and fundamental error from whence so many others proceeded, and which Constantine committed in the establishment of Christianity, was this, which has been touched already. He admitted a clergy into the establishment, on the same foot on which this order had stood, whilst Christianity was the religion, and these men were the heads, the directors, the governors, and magistrates of a sect by no authority but that of the sect itself, and therefore illegally such. He admitted them, vested with this authority, which might be necessary as long as Christians made a sect apart, distinct from the other subjects of the empire, and not only out of the protection of the laws, but obnoxious to them, and which became unnecessary and dangerous when Christianity had a legal establish-

ment, and when the professors of it were entirely incorporated into the empire, enjoyed the protection of the laws in common with other subjects, and more of the smiles and favors of the court. The conduct of Constantine, on this great occasion, must needs appear extremely absurd to every one who considers the consequences it had. But we may easily conceive that the state of Christianity, of paganism, and of the empire in general, as well as a multitude of particular circumstances to us unknown, might determine him, on apparent reasons of good policy, to hold it. If we seek for these reasons in the historians of that age, or in more modern ecclesiastical writers, we shall be misled or disappointed. Eusebius wrote a panegyric, Zozimus a satire, and no relations can be more confused, no authority more precarious than those of all the authors who have treated these subjects, and indeed every other ecclesiastical subject from that age to this. They have been all intent to serve some particular turn: and though all men are regardless of truth in such a disposition of mind, yet are there none so regardless of it as these writers, who have rendered church history more inconsistent, and more grossly fabulous, than any other history, perhaps than some romances. But still, notwithstanding the little reliance that any of them deserve, some general truths result from the concurrent tenor of their writing; two of which I shall mention, in order to account for the conduct of Constantine.

SECTION XXV.

The first of these truths is, that this emperor neither designed to establish Christianity, nor did in fact establish it with any other view, than that of making it subservient to his ambition and policy. He worked up this establishment of religion, which he preferred to paganism, for reasons already given, by slow degrees, as he found it answer his purposes, and he trimmed long between the two. The second of these truths is, that in the design of attaching the whole body of Christians to himself, he chose to do it by the medium of the clergy. The Christians were dispersed over the empire, and even beyond the bounds of it. They were of all nations and all languages. But among them all, this order of men, which we call the religious society, was established.— This order was often divided; and their divisions formed different sects. But however divided they were, nay the more they were divided, the more need they had of imperial favor. The pastors were brought by one common interest under the influence of the court; and the flocks were every where under the influence of their pastors. These two principles run through the whole con-

duct of Constantine, in every relation of it that is come down to us.

There is little room to doubt, that he had taken the resolution of establishing Christianity when he marched, in the seventh year of his reign, from Gaul into Italy against Maxentius. It is much more probable too, that this resolution produced the miracle of an illuminated cross in the air, with an incription promising him victory, and which he affirmed upon oath that he had seen, as Eusebius relates, than that any such miracle produced his conversion. A story like this was sufficient to make the impression he designed. Nay that which Zozimus relates of a monstrous flight of owls, that settled on the walls of Rome when Maxentius marched out of the city to give Constantine battle, and which this emperor seeing, drew out his troops, might have its effect likewise. His army did not consist of Romans, attached to their ancient religion, though even by such the omen would have been well received, but of Britons, whom we believe to have been already Christians, and of the Celtic nations, to whom we may believe that all religions were indifferent enough.

But however this might be, whether Constantine came into Italy with a resolution to establish Christianity, and of leaning on that party in the empire, or whether he took the resolution when he had beat Maxentius, it is evident that this resolution was no other than I have represented it. Licinius was not certainly a convert to Christianity, and yet the first edict in favor of this religion was published in his name and by his authority, as well as in the name and by the authority of Constantine. This edict gave an entire liberty of conscience. No person was to be any longer restrained from embracing Christianity, but every one was set at liberty to profess the religion he liked best. This was the purport of the edict. Eusebius himself carries it no farther, and there was nothing in it which Licinius, or any other pagan prince, who thought it his interest to relax the severity of former edicts, and to keep measures of moderation with the Christians, might not grant without becoming a Christian. Many other favors, more considerable, and particular to Christianity, were granted afterwards. Eusebius sounds them high:* and they were great, no doubt, though they did little more than re-establish Christians in their former rights and possessions, remit unjust and cruel sentences, restore confiscations, and recall from banishment and the mines such as had been condemned to them. In all these instances, the authority of Licinius concurred with that of Constantine: and if paganism was not extirpated, Christianity was in a good degree established, whilst they governed the empire

* Euseb. passim in Hist. et in Vita Constant.

jointly. When they quarrelled, the same political motive, that made Licinius change his conduct and persecute the Christians, made Constantine persist in showing favor to them. He raised them to the highest dignities, entrusted them with the most important commands, and increased the strength of a party in the empire which was zealously attached to him.

Notwithstanding this he trimmed with the other, and it is evident that his zeal for Christianity was at least as much political as religious. Eusebius makes him very devout and pious, and compares, in one place, his palace to a church in which assemblies of the faithful were held. But as the flagrant crimes he committed are inconsistent with the devotion and piety ascribed to him by ecclesiastical adulation, so the whole tenor of his public acts demonstrates that Zozimus had some reason to say, he favored the pagan rites in order to please the senate, though he meant to establish Christianity. Thus he permitted, even about the time that he held the Nicæan council, and by a solemn rescript, that the aruspices should be publicly consulted; nay he commanded it on the occasion of some reputed prodigies that had happened. Thus again, he gave countenance, at least, to several superstitious sports that were celebrated in acknowledgment of victories obtained, and to several sorts of enchantments that were deemed effectual to procure health and other divine favors. Many instances of the same kind may be produced, to show what measures Constantine thought himself obliged in good policy to keep with paganism, even after he had vanquished Licinius, and put him to death. But it will be sufficient that I mention one more, which was the strongest of all, and which leads to the second of these general truths, that have been observed to result from all the histories of this great revolution.

That several offices, which were not only pagan in name, but in their functions too, were possessed and executed by those who professed Christianity, seems to me much more clear than the distinctions and excuses that are brought in favor of the practice. The practice was authorised by the example of Constantine, who held to the last the supreme pontificate of the pagan church. I know that some writers have ventured to deny the fact, against the evidence of history and ancient inscriptions. I know too, that much casuistry has been employed by Baronius and others, to show that Christian emperors might assume the title, and wear the robe, without superstition or idolatry; for these authors are pleased to suppose, that they did no more. But they contradict themselves when they excuse even this, by urging, that the authority of supreme pontiff was necessary to keep the senate and the bulk of the people, who were strongly addicted to the old religion, in subjection to the imperial authority; for how could

the authority of supreme pontiff have this or any other effect, unless it was exercised? And how could it be exercised, without taking some share in the superstitious discipline signified by that mystic robe,* which Gratian is said to have refused to wear for that very reason? But if Gratian was thus scrupulous, and his successors after him, of which we may have leave to doubt, Constantine was not so; or he might wear the mystic robe of pontiff with as little regard to the significations of it, as one of the Othos had, very probably, to those of the robe he wore, and whereon the revelations of the Apocalypse were expressed in embroidery. The power and influence of this office had been great at all times and therefore the emperors had kept it like that of the tribunes in their own hands. But this power and this influence were never greater than now, and the office of pontiff was grown more considerable than that of consul. It is very probable that Constantine dared not divest himself of it: and I believe the best reason that can be given why he did not make himself sovereign pontiff of the Christians is this, that he found it necessary, or at least expedient, to continue high priest of the Pagans. The absurdity, however, was equally great, whether it was owing to his misfortune or his fault. The absurdity, I mean, of presiding over a church he intended to subvert, and not presiding over that which he intended to erect.

The consequences began to appear very soon, and have continued ever since producing, under various forms, in various ways, and with little or no interruption, an uniformity of mischief. The pre-eminence and dominion over conscience, which a religious society had acquired among the Christians whilst they were a sect in the empire, did not only continue, but were vastly extended and increased when this religion became the established religion of the empire. They were extended and increased in the exercise, and therefore in the effect of them. No powers were taken from this order of men, not even those to which they had the least pretence after this great change. On the contrary, many were added to them, and the weight of that civil authority, on which they usurped, served to enforce their usurpations.—Their pre-eminence and their dominion over conscience had been so far from promoting charity, and maintaining unity, that they had promoted and maintained a perpetual strife and contention among Christians. If Christians suffered much by heathen persecutions, they suffered much by their own intestine divisions. They could not, indeed, make war, and massacre one another, nor disturb, in that manner, the peace of the empire. The authority of the emperors, and the strength of the Roman

* Zozimus.

legions kept them in awe, and made such successes impracticable. But their divisions were such, that the sect might have been dissolved, perhaps, whilst it was a sect, and the very name of Christianity have been lost, if the salutary remedy of a persecution, common to them all, had not sometimes intervened to make them remember, that they were all of the same religion. These disorders, however, being confined to a sect, affected the Roman state no more than ours would be affected, if any disputes should arise about inward light and spiritual gifts among the Quakers, and if those peaceable persons should fall out, call names, and excommunicate one another. But when the empire became Christian, these divisions became fatal to the public tranquillity and welfare.

Constantine had some experience of this in his own reign, towards the end of it especially. But he might still hope, and the submissive behaviour of the clergy towards him might encourage him to hope, that however divided they were concerning speculative points of religion, he should hold them fast to his interest by their own, and being master of the shepherds, should be master of the flocks, as it has been hinted already. He pursued this principle therefore. He added to the dignity of ecclesiastical persons, by the regard he showed them, and by the honors he affected to do them. He added to their power and authority, by the wealth, the privileges, and immunities he bestowed upon them, and by the laws he made in their favor. All this tended, in appearance and in pretence, to the support and improvement of a spiritual power alone. He meant, that this should be distinct from the civil; that they should be independent of one another, and both dependent on him; and he did not see that this was a distinction without any real difference. He does not seem to have enough considered two things, which long experience has made manifest since, and which one would imagine he should have foreseen. He should have foreseen, that ecclesiastical magistrates would be always less dependent on the emperors than the civil, and were for that reason less fit to be trusted with power. It was obvious, that civil magistrates were the creatures of his will, whom he could make and unmake at pleasure, and not only deprive of the offices they held, but of all right to any migistracy whatever; whereas these ecclesiastical magistrates, whom he admitted by a legal establishment into the empire, were elected independently on him into particular offices, and had a right to this sort of magistracy in general, which he could neither give nor take away. He should have foreseen, that an absolute power over private consciences was in nature, and might prove in effect, a much greater power than his own; that the church might turn against the state;

from the companion become the rival, and from the rival, the tyrant of it. This happened in four centuries after his time. The constitution of the Christian church, before Constantine laid the foundations of that spiritual tyranny, which he and his successors raised; and this spiritual tyranny, established and grown into full strength before Charles the Great, laid the foundations of that temporal tyranny, which he and his father established in the bishops of Rome, the remains of which are still existent.

SECTION XXVI.

During this period, that reaches from the beginning of the fourth to the end of the eighth century, the religious society pretended directly to spiritual power alone, as it has been observed. Indirectly, indeed, they assumed a share of the other, encroached on the civil magistrates, and opposed and insulted them, whereof there were several instances at Rome and Alexandria particularly.* But in the main, they expressed great

* No instance of this kind can be given greater than the whole conduct of Cyril, the Alexandrian bishop. This saint and father of the church was violent and cruel against all those who differed from him, even in expression; for Nestorius did little more: and yet, when he had prevailed on Theodosius, by bribing most probably the eunuch Scholasticus, to turn at once from favoring Nestorius to declare against him, this wretch, in concert with Pope Celestinus, persecuted the poor man to death with the most persevering and inveterate malice. He showed the same violence of temper in usurping on the civil power, and in supporting these usurpations by riots, insurrections, and assassinations. He took upon him, without any authority from the civil magistrate, to punish not only Jews, but such Christians as he called heretics; to drive them out of the city, and to plunder their houses and churches, the spoils of which he abandoned to the mob, who were the instruments of his tyranny, for their greater encouragement. Orestes, the governor of Alexandria, complained of these invasions and outrages, and attempted to restrain them, as it was his duty to do. But Cyril, by exciting the common people, the most seditious that were to be found in any city of the empire, maintained, as it were, a civil war in that city, and called in another sort of mob to join with this in supporting it. He called in five hundred monks at once from their retreats in the mountains of Nitria. To one of these, named Ammonius, a fit instrument for his purpose, he gave the command of this secular and ecclesiastical mob, by whom Orestes was attacked in the streets of Alexandria. He was rescued, indeed, and his life was saved, though he had been wounded by Ammonius in the fray. The mob was dispersed, Ammonius seized and put to death, and Cyril had the impudence to declare him a martyr, and to cause him to be honored as such.

It may not be amiss to mention another example of the revengeful and sanguinary character of this prelate. Hypatia was a Platonician lady, of so much wisdom, knowledge, and virtue, that she used to be consulted by the philosophers, and even the governors of Alexandria, and that Orestes was particularly attached to her. To be revenged, therefore, of Orestes, for Hypatia does not

respect and submission to the emperors. Constantine abetted them in the exercise of this power, and his successors sometimes through bigotry, and sometimes through policy, as we may collect from the different characters of these princes, made themselves parties, on one side or the other, in every ecclesiastical dispute that arose. This gave them much to do, maintained a perpetual ferment in the the empire, and was almost as great an evil from within, as the inundation of barbarous nations was from without.

Let us not presume, like many divines, to account, by the short and fallible rule of human reason, for what providence directs or suffers. But we may observe with astonishment, that a religion, revealed by God himself, taught by himself in one country, where he sealed it with his blood, as strangely as that may sound to a mere theist, and propagated through a great part of the world by persons commissioned by him, as well as assisted supernaturally by the Holy Ghost, should continue more than seventeen hundred years in a flux state. I affirm the more boldly, that it has continued in this state so long, because, though it will be said, and is said every day in the pulpit, that all the important points of Christianity, and every thing made necessary to salvation, are fixed and clear, yet the assertion is evidently false, when it is applied to theological, however true it would be, if it was applied to gospel Christianity; and it may be proved to be so even out of the inconsistent mouths of those who make it. To whatever sect we addict ourselves, if we are saved, it must be on the faith of man, it cannot be on that of God; for the pure word of God neither is nor ever has been the sole criterion of orthodoxy. Theology has done by the word, as philosophy did by the works of God, and the same abuse has been made of both. Naturalists have built immense systems of imagination on a few sensible phenomena, inaccurately observed very often; and not always very fairly recorded. Divines have done the same, on a few intelligible and unintelligible passages, picked up here and there in the Scriptures, and connected and commented as their purposes required. The first have not stopped where the phenomena have ceased; nor the other, where the Scriptures have been silent, or have not spoken clearly; which ought to be reputed the

appear to have given him any provocation, this woman was attacked by another ecclesiastical bravo, whose name was Peter, at the instigation of Cyril, in the streets of Alexandria, where they stripped her naked, dragged her along, and made her suffer the most cruel outrages, till she expired.

It is not worth my while to quote any more instances of the usurpations and cruelty which the religious society exercised, whenever, and wherever, they durst. History is full of them. They were exercised at Rome sometimes, as well as at Alexandria, and wherever Christianity prevailed.

same, and to check our presumption alike. On the contrary, where they have had no rule to go by, like men freed from restraint, they have gone the greatest and the boldest lengths. This has been the case from the apostolical days to these, and to this we owe all the disputes that have puzzled religion, and all the mischief which these disputes have brought on the world. This must be the case too, till divines return to the gospel, as philosophers have returned to nature, and presume to dogmatise no farther than the plain import of it will justify, contenting themselves to leave things dark and ambiguous, which revelation has left so. How soon this will happen, I know not. Such a method is now, as it was of old, too sober for enthusiasts, the subject too barren for rhetors, and the avowal of ignorance too humble for doctors, who pretend to teach supernatural, as well as natural theology, and to assume to themselves, that knowledge, which Christ intended should be common to all who are to be saved by it, as Erasmus somewhere or other observes.* But we must go back again to the primitive ages, that we may see in some few particular instances, the rise and growth of human authority in matters of religion.

It was foretold, that false prophets would arise among Christians, and it was natural that they should in such an age, in countries where the minds of men had been long prepared for every thing that appeared supernatural or mystic, and on the publication of a religion new and marvellous. Converted Jews might think, and in fact did think, that they had a right to take their share in building up and adorning a religion, which sprung out of theirs, and whose authority rested on that of their prophecies. Converted heathens might think, and in fact did think, that they had at least as good a right of the same kind, since some of the most sublime doctrines of Christianity were such as Pythagoras and Plato had taught, and since the prophecies, urged from heathen records concerning Christ, were much more clear and express than any of those that were brought from the Jewish Scriptures. But there were other circumstances, which gave more immediate temptation and pretence to the false prophets that arose in the days of the apostles and multiplied very fast afterwards, like swarms of insects from those dung-hills, the cabbalistical schools of Jews, and the metaphysical schools of heathens.

The Christian system of faith and practice was taught by God himself, and to assert or to imply, that the divine Logos, who was incarnated to instruct as well as to redeem mankind, re-

* ——— ad paucos homines contrahimus rem, quâ Christus voluit nihil esse communius.

vealed it incompletely or imperfectly, is not less absurd nor less impious, than to assert, or to imply, that he performed the work of our redemption incompletely or imperfectly. Christianity therefore, as the Saviour published it, was full and sufficient to all the purposes of it. Simplicity and plainness showed, that it was designed to be the religion of mankind, and manifested likewise the divinity of its original. But then, this very simplicity and plainness was a stumbling block to some, and a pretence to others. The theology of those ages had accustomed men to think, that nothing could be divine, which was not mysterious, and that incoherent, obscure rhapsodies, which are frequently the language of ignorance or fraud, were sure characteristics of superior knowledge in the first philosophy, or of inspiration from above. The prophets, among the Jews, had spoke in this style; the heathen oracles pronounced enigmas; the theology of Egypt and the East was unintelligible, and the metaphysical refinements of the Greek philosophers were a mere jargon of words, supposed to signify most sublime truths, though they had really no meaning at all. The Jews, therefore, who believed in the Messiah when he appeared, and the heathens, who heard that the divine Logos had appeared, could not fail to receive his doctrine agreeably to their prejudices and habitudes. A system of natural law, enforced by a divine mission, and a divine sanction, had nothing in it which was new to either of them; and the heathens knew, that the title of Son of God had been given to Zoroaster and to others. But the simplicity and plainness of his doctrine might surprise them the more, for this very reason. They could scarce fail to persuade themselves, that this simplicity and plainness must be the veil of something more marvellous and more worthy of a revelation. All was type and figure in the sacred writings of the Jews, and they were obliged to understand now of a spiritual, what they had till now understood of a temporal kingdom. All the gross conceptions of polytheism and idolatry were exploded. Heaven continued to be peopled as much as ever, but with inhabitants of another kind. In short all the pompous rites and ceremonies of external worship were abolished at first among Christians, and God was to be adored in spirit and in truth. After such changes as these, it seems to me, that the converts to Christianity could not, as they did not, fail, agreeably to their prejudices and habitudes, to embroider some of the tinsel of the religions they left on the religion they embraced, nor to make the spirituality of one as fit to create astonishment, and to maintain an attachment in the minds of men, as the carnality of the others.

This was done, the great means of doing it offered themselves. Christianity was taught first, and propagated afterwards, by

word of mouth. So the apostles and the disciples received it, and so they instructed the converts they made in their several dispersions. Nor were these the sole preachers of divine revelation. Others arose who had not been taught in the same school, nor been commissioned to teach in the same manner. Paul himself was one of these. He entered a volunteer into the apostleship. At least his extraordinary vocation was known to none but himself. He went about preaching his gospel, as he called it, before he had any correspondence, or even acquaintance, with those who composed the church of Christ at that time; and when he came among them he took the air of a master, submitted to none, but controled and reprimanded even the prince of the apostles, as you pretended Catholics affect to call St. Peter. The apostles, the disciples, and the first converts in general, were ignorant, illiterate persons. Such men, therefore, as deemed themselves more skilful in cabalistical interpretations of the Scriptures, and more knowing in Jewish and heathen theology, might assume the same rights which the apostles and disciples exercised; teach, convert, and form different congregations: or they might add to, and alter the doctrines, which the apostles and disciples taught, and thus form different sects, in the same churches, by assuming no other right than that which every member had, man and woman indiscriminately, the right of prophesying or preaching, as often as they pleased to suppose that the spirit moved them to it. The apostles opposed the false prophets that arose in their time, by epistles, by messages, and by revisiting the churches they had themselves founded, but often without effect, and always with much difficulty, as we may judge by that which Paul found to maintain his authority in the church of Corinth, and in others.

One would think that the gifts of the spirit, among which this of prophesying or preaching held a first place, should not only have supplied the want of all other knowledge, and have put to silence the most learned and eloquent, but should have established, by the influence and energy of one and the same spirit, one and the same system of faith and manners in the whole Christian church. This would have been the case too, it must have been so necessarily, if all those who pretended to gifts of the spirit had really had them; and it has always seemed to me that Origen answered Celsus very poorly, when, to justify or excuse the variety of opinions and sects among Christians, he urges those that abounded among the heathen philosophers. But many thought they had these gifts of the spirit who had them not, many pretended to have them who knew they had them not; and it grew so easy to impose the belief of them on the multitude, that Simon, who had offered to buy them, might

think himself well off that bargain, perhaps, and that the other heretics who arose might not find any want of them to establish their sects. The belief that they had them was easily wrought by sham miracles, by seeming or real austerity of life, by discourses filled with false sublime about spiritual beings and metaphysical or supernatural doctrines, and by other proofs of the same equivocal sort, in an age when enthusiasm was the epidemical disease, and when one great revelation gave occasion and pretence to so many little ones. That such was the temper of the age, and such the character of those who professed Christianity in it, will appear the less doubtful to us, if we call to mind the several apocalypses that were current among the primitive Christians, the Apocalypse or Revelation of St. John, and that of Cerinthus, for instance, if they were not the same, and if the reveries of a mad Judaising Christian have not got into the canon under the apostle's name: the apocalypse of St. Peter, that of St. Paul, and that of St. Thomas likewise, all of which are now lost, and have been so long, but the style and matter of which may be guessed at with sufficient assurance by the style and matter of that which we have in our hands. That the apostles, to whom these are ascribed, were not the authors of them may well be. But the authors of them were Christians; and if all the fathers and churches did not receive them, as all did not receive the apocalypse admitted into our canon, yet many did, and that is sufficient for my purpose, especially when it is joined to so many other instances of enthusiasm as the first Christians gave, which cannot be denied, though the terms may be changed, and madness and frenzy may be called divine illumination, mystical rapture, or holy zeal.

The names alone of those who held different opinions concerning the most important points of Christianity, and formed different sects, would fill a very long roll; and even a summary account of their doctrines would fill a treatise much larger than I design this essay shall be. Besides which, I am far from believing the greatest part of the absurdities, profanations and impieties imputed to them by Irenæus, Epiphanius, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and others, some as ancient, and some more modern. What credit and what respect soever fathers and ecclesiastical writers may deserve on other subjects, sure I am that they deserve none, when they speak of those who differed from them, and on whom, for that sufficient reason, the brand of heresy had been once fixed. The parties of such men were their judges: and we know them only by the passionate accusations which their enemies brought, and the severe sentences which they pronounced. Even the writings against opinions that prevailed after long contests, and contests sometimes

of dubious issue in the church, as well as the writings against Christianity itself, were stifled in their birth, or destroyed afterwards by the vigilance of the orthodox, and the zeal of emperors who exerted their whole authority for this purpose; instances of which are to be found in the Theodosian code, particularly. Nothing can be, therefore, more uncharitable, nor more unjust, for charity and justice are due to the dead as well as to the living, than to join in the common cry against the heretics, that arose in the first and succeeding ages of the church, to do this implicitly on the most suspicious testimony, and to do it in the full extent of abominations and absurdities imputed to them by ecclesiastical writers. I shall decline this proceeding, though the custom be so established, and so sanctified in opinion, that he who declines it runs the risk of becoming an object of the same uncharitableness and injustice.

Many accusations have been brought by Christians against Christians, that carry on their front as evident marks of calumny as any of those which the heathen brought against the whole body of Christians, in the rage of party and the fury of persecution. The former seem even to have been invented on the latter, and they were applied to the same cruel use wherever the orthodox had power for it. The Carpocratians, or the Montanists, or both, for both were comprehended in the general appellation of Gnostics, lay under the imputation of drawing blood from infants, and making up the sacramental bread with it. Can we doubt that this idle tale took its rise from another, which the heathens propagated against the Christians, whom they accused of sacrificing children and eating their flesh? That the celebration of nocturnal mysteries among the Christians might give rise to some debauch, as it had done among the pagans, we may believe. But that the promiscuous, nay incestuous use of women was a religious institution of any sect, or that the Nicholaites prescribed this use of them on every Friday, as one of the necessary means of salvation, I believe no more than I do the silly story, as circumstantial as it is, which Tertullian refutes, of a dog tied to a candlestick in the love-feasts of Christians, which he pulled down and extinguished by catching at a piece of bread thrown out of his reach; after which, not only other devout persons mingled together in the dark promiscuously, but even fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, brother and sisters, in one common incest.

These objections, and such as these, should not have been made by the orthodox, out of a regard to truth; nor should others have been insisted on as much as they were, perhaps; in point of prudence. The Simonians were reputed magicians, like the founder of their sect. So were the Carpocratians, the

Valentinians, and others. They pretended to charms and enchantments, to command the good, to constrain the evil spirits, and to exercise all the imaginary powers of this kind, which were believed in a superstitious age, under the notion of magic natural and theurgic. The imposition was gross, no doubt, and the practice a cheat. But if we had in our hands the apologies of these heretics, as we have those of the orthodox, I suspect that we should find the former ready to justify, or to excuse, themselves by the example of the latter. They might quote, unjustly indeed, but plausibly at that time, the precept of St. James,* and the practice of the church as an example of both kinds of magic in one. The apostle directs, that prayers should be said over the sick, and that they should be anointed with oil in the name of the Lord; the effect of which ceremony was to be the cure of their infirmities, and the remission of their sins. Your pretended Catholic church employs it so late, that, though you believe piously that it serves for the remission of sins, you cannot discover, by experiment, whether it serves as effectually to the cure of diseases. But in the primitive church, the remedy was employed for both, and the sick took it betimes. It was a secret, might the apologist of heresy say, both of natural and theurgic magic, and they might pretend that several such had been discovered by them, or by their illuminated masters. They might proceed farther, and quote all the pompous things that Christian apologists used to advance concerning the power they pretended to exercise daily over demons, whom they conjured, subdued, and expelled out of the bodies of men, when all the exorcisms of the heathens had failed. The apologists of these heresies, who wrote later, might urge still greater authorities to justify their pretensions. They might appeal, for instance, to the constant and universal practice of their adversaries themselves, even in that age, who admitted neither children nor persons grown up to baptism, till the impure spirits were driven from them by exorcisms, and by the holy blowings of priests upon them, which superstitious ceremony was brought gravely as a proof in the dispute with the Semi-Pelagians about grace, and was supposed necessary to precede baptism, as baptism grace.

The truth is, that several of the superstitious notions, institutions, and customs of the eastern and Egyptian nations crept into Christianity, round about through Judaism at first, and afterwards directly. Every one took of this tinsel, as I called it above, what he liked best, or what he thought might be best adjusted to improve the Christian system. This was done by

* Chap. v.

Jewish converts, in the spirit of the cabbala, which taught them, under the pretence of explaining, to create mysteries where there were none, and by heathen converts, in the delirious spirit of metaphysics, which they had caught from the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy. It was common to all Christians. It was not confined to those who were called heretics, because they differed from those who assumed the title of orthodox. If the former assumed the pompous title of Gnostics, and despised the first preachers of Christianity as ignorant and illiterate men, the latter grew Gnostics soon, without assuming the title, though Clement of Alexandria maintained, that to be a good Christian, it was necessary to be a good Gnostic. Thus ignorance and learning conspired to turn the plainest religion that ever was into a chaos of theology, from which it has never been reduced again to a uniform, consistent, and intelligible system. It seems too that the teachers of it have never designed that it should be so reduced; for they have proceeded, in every age, as if religion was intended, says the author of Hudibras very sensibly, in his burlesque style, for nothing else but to be mended. God drew light out of darkness: men have drawn darkness out of light; and whilst many have pretended to be their guides, they have wandered different ways without any guide at all; for it is in this case most true, that the blind have led the blind, and they have all fallen, some into one ditch, some into another. All have pretended submission to the authority of God. All without exception, orthodox as well as heretics, have submitted, in truth, to the authority of man. Numberless human institutions have divided a world that the divine might have united, and instead of universal peace, founded on universal benevolence, the natural effect of the latter, they have caused and maintained perpetual discord, hatred, wars, persecutions, and massacres. I said that Christianity became a chaos of theology, and the image is proper. It has been composed of jarring elements ever since.

——— ——— ——— nulli sua forma manebat,
Obstabatque aliis aliud. ——— ——— ——— ———

These divisions and contentions were so general in the primitive church, that St. Jerom supposes them to have given occasion to the institution of bishops: and I will observe by the way, that I may make my court to your clergy and ours, that even on this hypothesis bishops may be reckoned of apostolical institution; since the reason of instituting them commenced in the days of the apostles. This reason was, according to St. Jerom,* because there would be otherwise as many schisms as

* Adv. Lucif.

priests, and because every one of these, drawing men to his private opinions, which was, I believe, the original meaning of the word heresy,* the church of Christ would be otherwise broken. Those assemblies which we call councils, had been convened for the same purpose, in imitation of that which was held at Jerusalem, and wherein the schism breaking out at Antioch, and fomented or authorised, at least, by the opposition of Peter and Paul, was compromised. But neither of these means proved effectual. Bishops quarrelled, disputed, intrigued, when they stood single: and when they assembled in councils, they anathematised, that is, they cursed and damned one another. Various gospels, various epistles, were current. They were all received, in some of the churches at least. What they contained, that are not come down to us, we know not. But we may well believe that they gave occasion to diversity of opinions, and since we know that the boasted chain of tradition was not uniform in some of the most important points, and since we know that the disputes which arose in Christian congregations, of how great or how little moment soever, were pushed with the utmost violence. The dispute just mentioned could not regard essentials; for about essentials the prince of the apostles could not err, nor would have yielded to a new comer who had never conversed with the Lord, and who could pretend to no more of the gifts and illuminations of the spirit than himself. Such again was the dispute about the celebration of Easter, in which, trifling as it was, much acrimony was shown, many synods were held, and a bishop of Rome† was on the point of excommunicating all the churches of Asia. I cite no more of this sort, which regarded chiefly discipline and outward observances, wherein there were some who affected greater evangelical purity, some who asserted evangelical liberty, and some who practised a sort of spiritual licentiousness. But I proceed to observe, that other disputes arose, wherein the most essential points of Christianity were supposed to consist. These were disputes about faith more than works; and though such of the disputants, as grew, by time, accident, management, or violence, to be reputed orthodox, damned those who differed from them; yet the points on which they differed were so undeterminable by revelation, and so incomprehensible to reason, that they remain, after all the mischief they have done, still undetermined for want of any criterion. Of the disputes about grace, predestination, free will, election, reprobation, sanctification, justification, and other sublime theological doctrines which St. Paul pretended to teach and to explain, and which it were to be wished that no man had

* Ad. Evag. † Victor.

presumed to teach after that great apostle, since they appeared obscure even to St. Peter, I shall say nothing. It will be sufficient that I say something of the opinions that were entertained, and of the disputes that arose in the primitive church, concerning the divine and spiritual natures.

Now concerning these particularly, we must observe that they were derived much more from the heathen than the Jewish theology. As much use as the latter made of angels in their Scriptures, and as fond as some writers have been to make Michael pass for a second essence in the Trinity, and Gabriel for a third, it has been the opinion of learned men, that the Jews did not know, before the captivity, so much as the names they gave to these heavenly messengers, after it. But to begin higher, and at the first principle of all theology. It has been shown, in one of these essays, on grounds of very great probability, that the one Supreme Being was known to the heathens, that he was acknowledged even by those among whom polytheism and idolatry prevailed, and that he was worshipped too, wherever a crowd of imaginary divinities, that superstition introduced, did not intercept this worship. It must be confessed, that this happened sooner or later in all those countries to which our traditions extend. They had ungenerated and generated, supercelestial and celestial gods, whole gods and half gods, and angels and demons, and genii and spirits, and souls, in all their systems of theology. This monstrous assemblage made the object of vulgar adoration. But we know that philosophers thought more reasonably at all times, or that their inward doctrine was less absurd than their outward, and that theism was taught more purely, and that religion was made more intellectnal by those of them who refined on this gross theology, like Pythagoras and Plato, whose philosophy had spread during some centuries before Christianity began, and was taught in the famous school of Alexandria, both when it began and long after. From this school there came some of the greatest advocates, and some of the greatest enemies, of Christianity; some of the greatest saints, and some of the greatest heretics. It could not happen otherwise, for many reasons, and among the rest for this. The sect of Potamo was established at this time, and the mode of choosing particular opinions in every sect, without an entire attachment to any one, was prevalent, as it has been said, I think, already. This mode had a great influence on the Christian system. Many instances of it might be produced. That of Origen may stand for all. He was zealous, but learned. He applied himself to the study of the Scriptures, and took infinite pains to establish the text, and fix the sense of them: but he was imbued so strongly with cabalistical and metaphysical notions and habits,

that he taught many whimsical doctrines, and gave much advantage to men every way his inferiors, to such as Jerom among the ancients, and such as Beza among the moderns.

Christians who formed their opinions concerning the Supreme Being in this school, or out of it, on the best principles of heathen theology, formed them very different from those of the Jews. They went into extremes on both sides. The Jews believed not only the monarchy of God over all being, but his unity; and were famous for their aversion to polytheism and idolatry at least after their seventy years' captivity. If they had not received this faith from their patriarchs, they might have learned it from the Egyptians. Nay their patriarchs might learn it by their commerce with this people. I do not say that they did. But this I say, that it is more easy to show how they might than divines have found it to give a sufficient reason why Moses, who took so many institutions from Egypt, of much less importance and efficacy towards the good government of a rebellious and obstinate people, neglected to inculcate the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and of a future state of rewards and punishments; which other legislators, who were not more learned than he was in all the learning of the Egyptians, took from them, and employed to the best purposes. But although the conceptions, which the Jews entertained of the Supreme Being, were thus far very orthodox in the eye of reason, and although their psalmists and their prophets strained their imaginations to express the most elevated sentiments of God, of his works, and of the methods of his providence; yet this eternal, this infinite Being was represented in their histories, and in the whole system of their religion, as a local tutelary deity, carried about in a trunk, or residing in a temple; as an ally, who had entered into a covenant with their fathers; as a legislator, who had written their laws with his own hand; as a king, who had actually held the reins of their government; and as an industrious magistrate, who descended into all the particulars of religious and civil administration, even into the most minute and meanest. Thus were the Jews accustomed to familiarise themselves with the Supreme Being, and to imagine that he familiarised himself with them; to think him constantly employed about them, as about the nation he had chosen for his elect and favorite people, and to figure him to themselves receiving their sacrifices, and listening to their prayers, sometimes, at least, as grossly as Lucian represents Jupiter. This will appear in the eye of reason to be one extreme.

The other carries a greater appearance of reverence to the Supreme Being, but is little less absurd: and whilst the direct tendency of the former notions was to promote superstition, and to make God the object of it, the indirect tendency of those I am

going to mention was to promote polytheism and idolatry. It would not be to the purpose to collect many things, which pagan monotheists have said of the Supreme Being. Plato himself would have done well, notwithstanding the sublime expressions concerning the divine nature, which are to be found in his writings, to keep the reserve on this subject, which he professes in one of his letters; and upon the whole, the heathen and Christian divines both would have done much better than they did, if they had followed more closely and more constantly the example of Simonides, who owned himself unable, after several delays, to answer the question Hiero put to him, "quid aut qualis esset Deus." The divine nature cannot be explained by human words; for it cannot be conceived by human ideas: and therefore none but delirious metaphysicians, who employ words, that impose by their sound and have no determinate ideas affixed to them, will ever attempt this explanation. All that the wit of man can do is to speak cautiously and reverently of it, according to those general notices of wisdom, and power, and majesty, and all other perfections, which we are able to collect, *à posteriori*, that is, from the works of God, and which serve still more to show our ignorance than our knowledge.

Sensible of this, the heathen divines in their sober moods represented the Supreme Being as hidden from us in the depths of darkness, or in excess of light; a first self existent cause of all existence; a real being, but above all essence; really intelligent, but above all intelligence; and lest such notions as these should carry men not only to think very truly of the incomprehensibility of God, but to imagine, according to the grossness of their conceptions, that the Creator was too far removed from his creature, the workman from his work, and the governor from the governed, the heathens invented a chain of beings from God to man, and a more extensive system of divine natures. The Jews had brought the first and only God, that they acknowledged, too near to man, and had made him an actor immediately and personally, as it were, in the creation and in the government of the world. This was too absurd for heathen divines. It could never enter into the conception of such as Plato, for instance, who declared, or made the first God declare in the Timæus, that the whole animal world must have been necessarily immortal, if it had been an immediate effect of the first cause. The same men would have deemed it a profanation, as well as an absurdity; and to avoid both one and the other, they assumed all those inferior gods, and ministering spirits, which became the objects of so much idolatry.

The Pythagorean and Platonic schools imagined two sorts of emanations from the Supreme Being, as it has been hinted. Some of these were supposed to go out of the deity, and to be partici-

pating beings. So they were called, and this class was numberless; since it contained all the inferior and younger gods, and all the spiritual beings, from the soul of the world, which Proclus, or one of the same mad tribe, calls the elder sister, down to the soul of man, which he calls the younger sister. Other emanations, two only, were assumed to remain in the deity, and to be emanations, that do not emane, goings out, that do not go out, the Logos or first mind, the Psyche or the first soul, one of whom was the Nous of Anaxagoras, the Demiurgus or the maker of the world, and the other a living self-moving principle, that gives life and motion to all that lives and moves. This was a trinity in the godhead, or this was the godhead, the *To theion*, such as several of the latter Platonists who turned Dogmatists, and laid aside the name of Academicians, conceived it to be. True it is, that scarce any two of the heathen trinitarians held the same language, no nor any one of them in two different places. It was the language of men, who rambled from one arbitrary hypothesis to another; and what I am to observe particularly here is, that although they spoke sometimes of the monad, or first unity alone, as God, yet they ascribed often so much to the second god, that the first became in some sort a non-entity, an abstract or notional being, a being and no being, without essence or nature, because above them, and rather an intelligible than an intelligent principle. Thus they left, in some sort, no place to the one true God in their conceptions, whilst they endeavored to raise him above all conception, and whilst some, like the Jews, employed him too much and in too trifling a manner in the formation and government of the world, they banished him almost intirely out of the system of his works.

I have mentioned these notions the rather, because their indirect tendency in their opposition to Judaism is to promote polytheism and idolatry, as I said above; and because, notwithstanding this tendency, they come the nearest to those that prevailed most in the Christian church, to those particularly that remained unfixed during three centuries, and that required the greatest efforts of human authority to reduce them, when they were fixed, into one uniform profession. On all these accounts it is proper to speak a little more largely of them.

SECTION XXVII.

I have spoken somewhere of the ditheistical doctrine. It was very ancient, no doubt, though not so universally professed as Plutarch represents it to have been. Oromasdes and Arimanius were the good and the bad principle among the Persians: Osiris

and Typhon among the Egyptians. Pythagoras has been suspected, not convicted, of holding this doctrine; for by his Duad, or evil principle, he might mean nothing more than matter; and Plato did only seem to lay some foundation for it, by his hypothesis concerning the original of evil. Cerdon or Marcion, or some of the Gnostics, introduced it into Christianity, and the sect who held it continued under the names of Manichæans and Paulicians from the third till the end of the ninth century. As repugnant as this doctrine is to our most clear and best determined ideas, it seemed to account for the existence of evil as well as good, and for the supposed irregular, unjust distribution of them, consistently with the belief of a Supreme Being, infinitely good. This was enough for such Arabian and Persian philosophers, as Scythianus, Terebinthus, or Manes, and indeed for most other philosophers, in ages when a little superficial plausibility was sufficient to convert any hypothesis, against the evidence of reason, into a dogma. I have recalled it in this place, because it leads me to make two observations, that will cast some light, the second especially, on the obscure and confused theology of which we are going to make mention. The tritheistical doctrine appears then to be as ancient as the ditheistical, that is, more ancient than our most ancient traditions, not only by many direct proofs, but even by this, that the primitive ditheists seemed to borrow from the other system, when, to improve their own, some of them altered it so far as to place a mediating principle between the good and the evil god. A strange kind of tritheism surely, or rather a system which partook of both, and was neither. We may observe in the next place, that the second god of the ditheists kept his rank but ill, and was degraded, from a co-equality and co-eternity with the first, to be an inferior, a created, a fallen being. He was, indeed, even in this state a very powerful being; since he could transport the Son of God from the desert to the top of the temple, and afterwards to that of a high mountain. That Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights, and that he was hungry, ought not to lessen our admiration of this diabolical strength: since we are not to consider it as bodily, but as spiritual strength, and this the Son of God could exert, as it appeared by his miracles, though he was in the body. The devil, notwithstanding this circumstance, of which he could not be ignorant, confided so much in his own strength, and was so impudent, that he tempted him, that he tauntingly quoted passages of the Scripture to him, as Jesus quoted some to the devil, and in short, that he insulted him so far as to bid him fall down and worship him.* These

* —— Si cadens adoraveris me.—Matth. iv.

facts must needs give us a very high opinion of the rank which the principal devil held among spiritual natures, and may induce us to think, that the devils, over whom the Christians exercised so much power afterwards, were devils of inferior sort: such as Scythianus, Terebinthus, and other magicians used to invoke from the tops of houses; in which exercise the two I have named fell down and broke their necks, according to Epiphanius, or one of them at least. But still the devil, the first and greatest of the diabolical society, was a degraded being. He began to be so among the pagans. Such the Christians allowed him to be, and he would have passed no longer for a first principle, nor a god self-existent and independent any where, if the heretics here spoken of had not revived and propagated this abominable opinion.

The very contrary happened in the tritheistical system, after the establishment of Christianity: and the second and the third divine hypostases grew by degrees not only into a similitude of nature, a co-equality and co-eternity, but into a sameness with the first. Let us descend into some particulars, concerning the original and progress of this theology. If it is matter of curiosity, it is matter of importance too.

I said, that the pagan doctrine of a trinity was more ancient than tradition. But if we could believe those ingenious persons, who find whatever they have a mind to find in the Bible, we should believe it to have been not a Pagan but a Jewish doctrine, not a philosophical hypothesis, but a divine revelation, not only older than tradition, but as old as the memorials Moses had of the creation. We are told in the first chapter of Genesis, that when God closed the work of the creation, he said, "let us make man after our image and likeness:"* and although he is made to speak, on the same subject, in the singular number, immediately afterwards, yet Christian divines assure us, that the Father addressed himself in these words to the Son and Holy Ghost, or to the first of them at least, and not to angels, nor any inferior intelligences, as he is said to have done in the Timæus of Plato. This difference may deserve our observation the more, because Plato in his writings acknowledged a trinity; whereas there is no direct nor clear hint, and much less any express declaration, of a trinity in this place, nor in any other part of the writings of Moses. There are indeed, among a multitude of vague and obscure expressions in the books of the Old Testament, some that seem to intimate like this a plurality of divine beings, and these have been hauled to signify the Christian trinity, though they were too equivocal and too dark to serve the purpose of leading men to the dis-

* Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram.

covery of it, and therefore to serve any purpose at all. But the divines I have mentioned would do well to consider, that they have a much less right to conclude, that the author of these books, wherein the unity of the godhead is every where established, meant to teach a plurality of hypostases in it which they assert, than any man would have to conclude from passages, that speak of God in the singular number, in books where polytheism is constantly asserted, that these authors meant to teach the unity of the godhead, which these divines deny that they did. He who is persuaded, as I am, that many of those who were polytheists in one sense, were monotheists in another, might assert the latter proposition without any absurdity. But these divines cannot assert either without the greatest, and especially since they know in how vague and loose a sense the word God is employed in the Scriptures, where it signifies sometimes a king or a chief magistrate, a prophet or a messenger from God, as we find in Exodus,* in Samuel,† in the Psalms,‡ in the gospel of St. John,§ and perhaps in other places.

But besides; if the doctrine of a trinity was found in express terms in the Pentateuch, we might be surprised, with some reason, that Moses had taught it to a people so strongly addicted, as the Israelites were, to the worship of many gods, and so little able to conceive the equality of three to one, and of one to three, a trinity in a unity, and a unity in a trinity; to a people to whom he would not teach the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and of a future state, on account of the many superstitions which this doctrine had begot in Egypt, as we must believe, or believe that he knew nothing of it, or assign some whimsical reason of this omission. But even in this case, which supposes an express mention of the trinity in the Pentateuch, we could frame no conclusive argument to prove this doctrine Mosaical in its origin. The religion, as well as government, of the Egyptians, was more ancient than that of Moses. He was learned in both; he borrowed from both; and no man of common sense can believe it more probable, whatever he may pretend, that the slaves instructed their masters, than that the masters instructed their slaves. If an express mention of the trinity was made in other parts of the Old Testament, the argument would be still less conclusive, because the Jews had been acquainted with schools wherein this doctrine was taught, either as a hidden or public doctrine, long before these books were renewed by Esdras, I use Bishop Huet's‖ expression, before some of them

* Exod. iv, 16; vii, 1.
† 1 Sam. xxvii, 13.
‡ Psalm lxxxi.
§ Gosp. St. John, x, 34.
‖ In Demon. Evang. "instauravit."

were written, perhaps, and before the canon of them was completed, we know very certainly neither by whom nor when.

If this doctrine was not Mosaical, neither was it Platonical in its origin, and much less was it invented by the latter Platonists in imitation of the Christian trinity. Plato speaks of one most simple being, the first intelligible. He speaks of a first mind, and a first soul, that soul of the world, some materials of which were left by God, in the bowl* in which he made it, to be mingled up into the souls of men; for it was but reasonable that the soul of man should be less perfect than the soul of the universe. That Plato was sincerely a Dogmatist I am far from believing, and I have on this head more regard to Tully than to St. Austin. But the latter Platonicians, who were such, taught this doctrine, like others of his theological and metaphysical whimsies, for in him and them they were whimsies, in that style. They were often a little less intelligible than he. What we do not understand in Plato, we must not expect to understand better in Plotinus, in Jamblicus, in Proclus, nor in the summary of his doctrine by Alcinoüs, nor, in short, in any of those writers whose heads have been turned with Pythagorean and Platonic theology. It was all the unmeaning jargon of Egyptian and Eastern metaphysics, and it did not acquire more meaning and perspicuity among the Greeks. On the contrary, I can easily persuade myself, that this jargon became still more obscure by the supposed improvements of Grecian Philosophy. But still the first principles of it, and of this doctrine in particular, were more ancient than the philosophical era in Greece. Strabo says, that the colleges of the Egyptian priests were desert in his time, and he lived two or three centuries sooner than Plotinus, Porphyry and Jamblicus. But there is no color to conclude from hence, that the theology these priests had taught was lost and forgotten, when these philosophers arose among others, and the school of Alexandria flourished. There were men still famous for their knowledge, an Abammon, an Anebo, for instance; and Jamblicus, who answered Porphyry's inquiries in a manner too mysterious not to be genuine, cites the authority of Egyptian scriptures and traditions. The author of the intellectual system mentions a passage which we may well take on his word, without consulting the original, wherein Jamblicus speaks plainly of three divine hypostases in the Egyptian theology. Eicton, an indivisible unity worshipped in silence. Emeph, the same probably as Kneph, and Hammon or Ptha, or Osiris, an active principle that was called by different names according to the different powers and energies ascribed to it. These were the Phanes,

* Crater is the word Mars. Ficin. uses.

Uranus, and Cronus of Orpheus. The three gods praised by the Pythagoricians. These were the three kings, the first good, the first mind, and the first soul, of Plato. Pythagoras had been instructed in the Orphic mysteries by Aglaophemus, and Plato was the next who received a perfect knowledge of all these divine things out of the Pythagoric and Orphic writings, according to the testimony of Proclus, in the first of his six books concerning the Platonic philosophy.

Thus it appears that the notion of a trinity made a part of Egyptian theology, and had been communicated to the Greeks even by Orpheus, that is, five or six centuries before the Babylonian captivity, and therefore long before Esdras, and long after Hermes. It is not worth while to make any observation on these dates, which would admit of several, nor to speak of the Zoroastrian, Chaldaic, or Samothracian trinities, any farther than to observe, that Democritus had written a commentary on the sacred letters on the Babylonians, and that both he and Hostanes, who lived in the time of Xerxes, and was himself a Chaldean, had taught the philosophy of that people or sect to the Greeks, and that this philosophy was understood to comprehend all the learning of the east. I proceed rather to observe, that this doctrine was taught with so much confusion, that the three gods were sometimes spoken of collectively, and that at other times each of them was spoken of alone. The second was sometimes, and most frequently, reputed the maker of this visible world. He was represented at other times to be to the first god, what light is to the sun; and I have read that Athanasius employed this comparison after the heathen divines, though it be absurd even to ridicule, in his system or in theirs. Sometimes the third hypostasis was spoken of as the maker of all things, according to patterns existing in the second, and at other times only as a soul which animated the material world, and which together with it composed one mighty animal. But the general run of opinion was different and more uniform. None of these heathen trinitarians had ever imagined three gods, essentially one, and one god essentially three. Whenever they spoke of three hypostases, they all supposed them distinct and subordinate. Rapin* acknowledges that Proclus did distinguish them so; but he asserts that Plotinus did not. Whence the Jesuit took this, I am ignorant. But it is certain that far from confounding them, or saying that they were all one god, Plotinus has said the very contrary in many places, and particularly where he approves Plato's explanation of the doctrine of Parmenides, and teaches a first, second and third unity in subordination.

* Comp. de Platon et Aristote.

SECTION XXVIII.

Since I have said so much on this subject, I will just mention some of the notions which these pneumatical madmen, Heathens, Jews, and Christians entertained concerning spiritual natures enferior to these. I observe then, that an affectation of investigating and explaining the original and first principles of things was the reigning folly of ancient philosophers. Thus the systems of cosmogony were, like that of Hesiod, so many systems of theogony, and the physiology of the universe was nothing better than a wild rhapsody of fables and allegories. When these would not pass, except on the ignorant and superstitious vulgar, they proceeded to a more refined manner of philosophising. What they could not account for by any knowledge they had of the sensible world, they endeavored to account for by the hypotheses they framed of an intellectual world. The sensible phenomena here below, to speak according to their conceptions, passed before them, and disappeared like the figures of a moving picture. They saw nothing permanent, nothing primarily efficient, a multitude of effects, no cause. They looked up to the heavens. Their senses were struck. They were surprised into idolatry first, they admired afterwards, and the more they examined, the more they admired. But their reason was not satisfied, nor the ends of their inquiries attained; their reason was not satisfied, because they discovered nothing but effects above as well as below, no self-existent, self-moving and intelligent causes. The ends of of their inquiries were not attained, because they inquired after such causes as these, instead of resolving all ultimately into the infinite wisdom and power of one first efficient cause, which is the proper conclusion of every physical inquiry. It solves every difficulty to a reasonable mind, that has inquired as far as the phenomena lead us; and if it did not, the want of a sufficient reason in them would be no reason for seeking one out of them. It would be a reason for stopping all inquiry.

Here we may fix the beginning of metaphysics. The ends of their researches were unattainable. Physics could not reach to them. But instead of abandoning these objects, philosophers resolved to change their method, to begin where they had hoped in vain to end, and to invent what they had flattered themselves that they should discover. For this purpose, the ideas of Plato were devised, which some imagine to be the same with the numbers of Pythagoras.* The first strangely absurd, the second

* Bruc. de convenientiâ numerorum Pythag. cum ideis Plat.

quite unintelligible. I shall speak, therefore, of the first alone. Now the second hypostasis, or the first mind, is according to this hypothesis an archetypal world, which contains intelligibly all that is contained sensibly in our world. These are the things which truly are, and the phenomena, which appear realities to sense, are nothing more than their faint, transient, and fallacious images. These are the eternal, immutable patterns of things; not only of simple ideas which we receive, but of complex ideas which we make; not only of substances, but of modes and relations. There is a first whiteness, or a first sweetness, as there is a first pulchritude, or a first gratitude, a first bigness or a first littleness. These are, therefore, the true objects of science. Some of the heathen divines supposed every one of these pretended abstract ideas to be a first principle or a divine being, and there are Christian divines who scruple not to talk of them as of eternal incorporeal essences, independent of God himself. Plato erected a mystic ladder, and he makes Socrates advise his auditors to climb by it into the region of forms, that is, from opinion to knowledge. Malebranche has no need of it. Things out of the mind he sees in God; and concerning things in it, he interrogates the Logos.

Pythagoras and Plato had learned of their eastern masters, and had taught others, to imagine a confused multitude of spiritual natures besides these, and besides the three first principles, under the different names of gods, angels, demons, and genii, spirits above the moon, good, happy, and immortal; and spirits below the moon, where death, misery, and all that is evil resides. In this system all is intelligible above, all is sensible below. Nor was this number of gods and other spiritual natures confused alone. It was indefinite too, and liable to be increased as philosophical purposes, and public or even private superstition, required. The latter Pythagoricians and Platonists, whom I confound because their doctrines were confounded together, far from softening the gross and most palpable absurdities of which we have spoken, imagined, besides all these beings, and immaterial entities residing in the first mind, an inconceivable number of eons, that is, of immortal spiritual beings proceeding by irradiation, emanation, or some other metaphysical generation, from the first being, and inhabiting the heavens and the stars. Thus if they did not determine the number of spiritual natures in general, as the number of angels was not determined by the Jews, they reduced them into determinate classes at least, and made them more apparently, and more immediately, dependent on the three hypostases that composed their deity. These were not called gods indeed, though they might have passed for such of the generated kind at least; and though there

were some persons who held the four first eons to be the tetrade of Pythagoras, nay though some were absurd enough to call the first self-existing spirit an eon, that is, an emanation, and therefore a contradiction as monstrous as that imputed to the Sabellians, who assumed, it has been said, that God the father was his own Son, and God the Son his own Father. But the word god began to be more sparingly used, and for that reason these doctrines might be, as they were, the more easily received by many who professed Christianity. The Jews, I suppose, might hold these emanations flowing from the divine essence, like beams from the sun, just as well as their ten superior lights called sephiroth; and the Christians might well admit eons into their system, since they, as well as the Jews, admitted cherubim and seraphim, archangels and angels. From the hypothesis, therefore, of a trinity of supreme but subordinate gods, subordinate to one another, a trinity of ranks or orders of beings was derived. A multitude of unities proceeding from the first unity, and superior to the first mind; a multitude of minds proceeding from the first mind, and superior to the first soul; a multitude of souls proceeding from the first soul, and superior to all other natures; for they dreamed too of a universal nature sometimes, I know not whether in or out of the Deity, from which all particular natures and all plastic principles flowed.

By these means sufficient provision was made for superstition and theological speculations. The same presumption, and the same misapplication and abuse of human reason that misled the heathen, misled the Christian world, and erected the most extravagant hypotheses, that delirious imaginations could frame, into dogmas concerning divine and spiritual nature. The heathen had in their power that rule of inquiry, and that criterion of truth, which God has given to all his rational creatures in the manifestation of his nature and attributes, as far as we are able to collect them from the system of his works, and from the course of his providence. It was, therefore, a great presumption, and a great abuse of reason, in those philosophers, to neglect this rule and this criterion; to inquire often without one, and to judge often against the other. But the Christian divines have done worse. They have another rule, and another criterion, besides these, supernatural as well as natural religion, the word as well as the works of God. One of these might carry their knowledge farther than the other, and it carries indeed this kind of knowledge, such as it is, a great way; but they were inexcusable when they pretended to acquire any knowledge, on such important and awful subjects especially, beyond both. They did it, however. Metaphysical heathens and cabalistical Jews imposed their reveries

on Christian fathers; and they imposed them on the whole Christian church, mingled up with those of their own over-heated brains.

But there is another cause of this pneumatical madness to be mentioned. It was not due alone to the fondness philosophers had of seeming to account metaphysically for what they could not account physically; it was due likewise to a fondness of another kind, to a fondness of making man pass for one of those beings that participated of the divine nature. This had long possessed the heathen theists, and it possessed the Christians with more advantage. Neither of them pretended to such constant communications, and familiar conversations with the Supreme Being, as the Jews did; though both of them boasted of divine influences, of inspirations, and of revelations made to them sleeping and waking. But then both of them boasted a natural, though distant relation with the Supreme Being, not only the moral relation of creatures to their Creator, but the natural relation of descendants to their common ancestor, a cognation, as Cudworth calls it, a sort of spiritual consanguinity. Several hypotheses had lengthened the chain of being very far from God downwards: and as divinity had been hauled down, humanity had been hoisted up, sometimes by gross and corporeal representations, sometimes by such as were more refined and spiritual. Man was made after the image of God in more systems than one, or rather, God was made after the image of man. The anthropomorphite heresy represented him with all the members, the shape and figure of a human body; and how the idolatrous heathens represented all their gods, and none more than Jupiter himself, in human bodies, and in human operations, is enough known. But there were other systems in which the similitude and natural relation between God and man were represented under images more refined and spiritual.

In the Jewish system, however, we understand the words of Moses, the Supreme Being made the body of man of the dirt of the earth. But the human soul was a portion of divine breath, "divinæ particula auræ." God breathed it into his face, and he became a living soul;* as God is said, in Scripture language, to be the living God. In the Platonic system, inferior intelligences were commissioned to make the whole animal kind, lest they should have been all immortal; but God reserved to himself the soul of man, which he made of the same substance as the soul of the universe, only a little less perfect, as it has been said. In the system we speak of, the divinity is allied to humanity as

* Inspiravit in faciem ejus spiraculum vitæ, et factus est homo in animam viventem.

effectually as the pride of man could desire, as effectually as in either of these. We assume, and the latter Platonicians as well as their founder assumed, that man is compounded of body and soul. As Plato asserted, that all souls were made at once, so they asserted, that all souls were made of the same nature. Human souls, therefore, proceeding from the first soul, which was sometimes confounded with, and sometimes distinguished from the soul of the universe, and this soul being superior to all natures, except the minds proceeding from the first mind, and the unities proceeding from the first unity, the relation between God and man was not very remote; whether they thought that the three hypostases composed one deity, as two substances composed one man; or whether they thought, that the three were distinct subordinate subsistences, and the soul the lowest of them. The relation, I say, was not very remote either way; and these philosophers might think their hypotheses the more decent for not making this relation closer. Proclus therefore, or Plotinus, or one of that tribe, had reason, you see, on this plan of theology to call the soul of the world the elder sister of the human soul: and if Origen did not come fully up to all these extravagances, he came very near to them, when he asserted that there was no difference, but that of merit, between the souls of archangels and angels, of devils and of men. The soul of Christ, according to this father, who was perhaps the greatest of the fathers, was of the same nature as all other rational souls, and was inseparably united with God, or made one with the word,* only on account of superior merit in a pre-existing state.

Thus human pride, as well as human curiosity, was indulged by heathen philosophers and by Platonising Christians. They grew up into a sort of pneumatical madness, or metaphysics were the dotage of physics: take which of the images you please. What these wild or dreaming philosophers could not do by any hypothesis about body, they attempted to do by the hypothesis of a soul: and since they could not make man participant of the divine nature by his body, however animated up to rationality, or with whatever adventitious powers they might suppose it endued, they thought fit to add a distinct spiritual to his corporeal substance, and to assume him to be a compound of both. A great variety of hypotheses was built on this one; but immortality was common to them all. In all of them, man was allied to God by some metaphysical genealogy, and even those of them, which, giving him immortality, exposed him to eternal damnation by it, were fondly received. He who considers what our

* —inseparabilem cum Deo fecerit unitatem—cum Verbo Dei unum efficitur.—Orig. de Princip. lib. 1.

manner of knowing is, what the faculties of our minds are, what the means we have of acquiring knowledge are; and how uncertain, how precarious, how confined it is in the highest degree of it; will think the soul as unfit to be participant of the divine nature as the body. Nay Plato, whom I quote on these occasions, "instar omnium," was so little able to prove the existence and immortality of the soul, and talked so much nonsense about the essence and essential properties of it, that he was obliged to have recourse from natural to moral arguments, which are indeed more plausible, but not more conclusive.

When these notions were once established, it was no hard matter to persuade men, nay it was no hard matter for those, who had a disposition and a temper of brain prone to enthusiasm, to persuade themselves, that by various methods of purification, and by intense meditation, which were in truth so many methods of growing mad, they could abstract themselves from all sensible objects, wrap themselves up in pure intellect, and be united to the Supreme Being. This madness has prevailed, and still prevails, under some form or other, and with little difference, in the East and in the West, among Christians, and heathens, among the orthodox and heretics. I need not quote instances. They have been frequent and notorious in China, in the East Indies, and in Europe. Pythagoras and Plato taught, that the supreme good of men was to be like God, and to be gods at last. Such opinions as these were held, with some variety of expression more than of substance, by the Manichæans and other heretics. The most orthodox fathers spoke of the communion of men with God, as of a mystery unknown indeed to men and angels till it was revealed, but suspected by the heathen philosophers, who were impelled to desire it by a natural instinct. A strange assertion this must appear, and equally false in every part. The communion of man with God was not a suspicion, it was a dogma, true or false, and an article of the Platonic faith; for Plato too required faith in traditional doctrines. It was not any particular instinct, that impelled the heathen to desire his communion, it was their pride and absurdity, the very human affections and passions from which these men pretended to be freed, that produced this presumptuous desire.

Such extravagant doctrines concerning divine and spiritual natures being taught with much confusion in the schools of heathen theology, they could not fail to be taught in those of Christianity with the same confusion, and to produce all the different opinions, that divided the Christian church. None of them knew very distinctly what they meant by the word spirit and spiritual substance, which were so often in their mouths. That they meant in general nothing more than breath, like animal

breath, and a thin subtile matter that escaped human sight in the ordinary way of seeing, is evident. They said, after Zoroaster and the magi, that God was original light, or an intelligent fire. They said, that this light was incorporeal, and yet they talked of it in such a manner as described a very corporeal light, invisible, however, to all eyes that were not fortified like those that enjoy the beatific vision. In short, spirituality did not imply incorporeity, and if one of those great divines was at hand to be asked what he meant by spiritual substance, he would answer in some metaphysical jargon; he would tell us, perhaps, that it is a substance "ab essentialitate succisa," which are words I have read, but cannot translate.

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